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MYTHS, REALITIES, A PROGRAM FOR ACTION

SCAPEGOATING THE BLACK FAMILY

BLACK WOMEN SPEAK

Margaret Burnham • Constance Clayton
Jewell Handy Gresham • Dorothy Height • Maxine Waters
Faye Wattleton • Margaret B. Wilkerson

WITH

Ossie Davis

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EXCHANGE.

FATHER KNOWS BEST

New York City

In her otherwise fine article of May 8, "March to a Crossroads on Abortion," Meredith Tax has included serious misconceptions which should be corrected. "For years before the passage of the Hyde amendment," she wrote, "the National Abortion Rights Action League (Naral), as well as Planned Parenthood, had asked for support on the ground that giving women abortion rights would cost less money than supporting welfare babies."

As founding chair of Naral, I assure Tax that no such stance would have been tolerated. Many black and minority leaders were on Naral's board, including March Hughes Fisher, Aileen Hernandez, Dr. Edgar Keemer and then-Borough President of Manhattan Percy Sutton. None of them, nor any board member, would have approved what Tax calls a "genocidal thrust."

I was also on the founding board of the National Organization for Women and have worked with it closely until the present. Tax's statement that NOW pushed the Equal Rights Amendment and "refused to work on anything else (or in coalition with anybody else) until 1985" is an erroneous interpretation. Even at the height of the E.R.A. campaign, NOW never lost sight of the crucial importance of abortion rights, backing the Abortion Rights Mobilization's case in Federal court on the tax exemption of the Catholic church, starting in 1980, as just one example.

Lawrence Lader, president
Abortion Rights Mobilization

SISTERS AND MOTHERS

Nashville, Tenn.

I was a bit surprised to learn that according to Meredith Tax I have gone the route of defending the family rather than taking women's issues seriously. When one has written five books and more than 100 essays on women and politics, it is a bit tricky to figure out Tax's criteria for "taking women's issues seriously" if lifelong involvement and commitment do not count.

Tax additionally taxes me (and Christopher Lasch, but he can speak for himself) with attributing the "disintegration" of the family to "female selfishness and the power of the women's movement." I do not recall having ever made such an argument. Perhaps Tax was overinterpreting my 1979 piece in *The Nation*, "Feminists Against the Family" (all right, an unfortunate title).

What I said there included: (1) By focusing on the family, feminist thinkers opened up "connections between sexuality, authority and power . . . in a provocative way"; (2) "Women were encouraged to create conceptual and linguistic tools to help them pierce the patterns of social reality. . . . hundreds of women began to view themselves less as passive recipients of revocable privileges and more as active, responsible beings"; and I no doubt began to offend Tax when I indicated that (3) there have been far too many "mean-spirited denunciations of all relations between men and women" together with "expressions of contempt for the female body, for pregnancy, childbirth and child rearing." I don't know how anyone can read feminist writings of the late 1960s and early 1970s and not find this contempt and such denunciations leaping off the page. I never argued that this was the totality of feminism but that it was one important and troubling feature. It still happens to be the case that most women at some point in their lives will be mothers. That is something worth thinking about in critical ways, yes, but with a generous, not condemnatory, spirit.

Much feminist argumentation seemed to me then to deepen rather than challenge the asocial individualism of ultraliberalism and consumerism. Tax, I take it, disagrees—a position I find a tad tricky to combine with her professed adherence to "socialism" or "social democracy," but that is her problem, not mine. But I do wish she would attack me for positions I actually hold rather than to take gratuitous swipes based on claims she has constructed but that I have never made. If she can point to a single text in which I highlight "female selfishness and the power of the women's movement" as *the* moving force in "the disintegration of the family" I would be happy to be corrected.

Jean Bethke Elshtain

TAX REPLIES

New York City

My article discussed the fact that relations between the black movement and people who support abortion rights have improved since the 1960s. The history of this problem goes back to struggles around eugenics and population control policy. (The best discussions of this topic are in Linda Gordon's *Woman's Body, Woman's Right*, Thomas B. Littlewood's *The Politics of Population Control* and Rosalind Petchesky's *Abortion and Woman's Choice.*) My own perspective developed in 1977, the year of the Hyde amendment and the beginning of the government offensive against abortion, which was also the year in which many of us organized to end sterilization abuse of minority women. In the interests of full disclosure, I should say that I was a founder and first co-chair of Carasa, the Committee for Abortion Rights and to End Sterilization Abuse. My feeling that Naral and Planned Parenthood were not as sensitive to racial and economic issues as they might have been is shaped by the fact that we were allies on abortion and opponents on the regulations to control sterilization abuse.

People support abortion rights for various reasons: feminists, because they see a woman's control of her own reproduction as an essential condition of full citizenship; population controllers, because abortion, like birth control and sterilization, is a way to cut down on what they see as a catastrophic population explosion. In the end, feminism and population control ideology are incompatible, for one puts woman's choice at the center, the other a particular vision of social good. Nevertheless, like many contradictory ideas, they can be found together in the same mind. Larry Lader was not only a board member of Naral and NOW but of Zero Population Growth and of the Association for Voluntary Sterilization (A.V.S.). He is also the author of *Breeding Ourselves to Death.* No one could challenge his record of support for abortion rights. But why does he support them, and on whose behalf? Lader states in *Abortion*, "One-third of all children on welfare today come from neglected homes, ignored and unwanted by either parent. . . . Above all, society must grasp the grim relationship between unwanted children and the violent rebellion of minority groups."

Population control policy-makers support abortion as a last resort for those times when birth control fails; but they are not really happy with most forms of birth control because they see women as too dull-witted or passionate to use them in a responsible fashion; they have always longed for something fool- (or woman-) proof. In the mid-1970s, they thought they had found it in the "mini-laparotomy," a surgical procedure so fast, cheap and efficient that it could be used to sterilize women in clinics on an outpatient basis. At this point they ran headlong into the women's health movement.

Few people now remember the storm that erupted over sterilization abuse in the early 1970s, with the case of the Relf sisters in Mississippi and the scandal of mass, sometimes forced, sterilizations in Puerto Rico, elsewhere in Latin America and in India. In 1973, a handful of women's health activists, led by Dr. Helen Rodriguez, then of Lincoln Hospital, formed CESA (the Committee to End Sterilization Abuse), which developed guidelines to insure that such sterilizations would not become routine in the United States. Carter Burden introduced these guidelines in the New York City Council in 1977, and they were taken up by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (H.E.W.) in 1979. The guidelines had two key provisions: informed consent in the preferred language of the patient, and a thirty-day waiting period between the signing of the consent form and the sterilization procedure. The waiting period was to prevent a situation in which patients were asked to sign a sterili-

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EDITORIALS.

Special Issue

The title of this week's special issue is "Scapegoating the Black Family," but its underlying theme is race, class and gender discrimination in America. When Thomas Jefferson declared that "all men are created equal," he was talking about the male sex; a class of property owners; and a race—whites, as opposed to the slaves, who were not deemed men. Yet Jefferson's words transcended the eighteenth-century society in which they were composed and speak to people of every time and place.

Racism, classism and sexism still plague us, and Jefferson's ideal still reproaches us. But too often mainstream inquiries into these matters are still framed by white men. In recent times the two most visible portraits of black family life have been drawn by Daniel Patrick Moynihan in his 1965 report and Bill Moyers's television documentary of 1986.

To get a perspective from black women, we have turned the articles section of this issue over to two guest editors: Jewell Handy Gresham, who deserves considerable credit for nurturing the idea through its long gestation, and Margaret B. Wilkerson. Both had full control over content, style and the selection of contributors. *The Nation* provided

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the forum, editorial services, advice and logistical support.

As it happens, on the eve of publication the Supreme Court handed down its decision in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*. Whatever else it does, the ruling further discriminates against the poor and will inevitably make life for the black family more difficult. This special issue of *The Nation* could not come at a more critical moment.

Roe on the Brink

On July 3, a majority of Supreme Court Justices turned what Justice Harry Blackmun in his dissent called a "stone face" toward women. In a decision foretelling the demise of procreative choice, particularly for the poor, the Court shook the constitutional foundations of women's liberty and equality.

The Supreme Court's decision in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* comprises five separate opinions, which collectively reverse the lower court and sustain Missouri's abortion-restrictive law. The Court upheld the preamble to Missouri's law, which declared that life begins at conception; the law's prohibition on performing abortions in public facilities; and its requirement that twenty-week fetuses be tested for weight and lung maturity. The Court dismissed as moot the challenge to Missouri's ban on abortion counseling.

The plurality opinion by Chief Justice William Rehnquist (joined by Justices Byron White and Anthony Kennedy) cuts the heart out of *Roe v. Wade*, explicitly rejecting its core principles while purporting to leave it "undisturbed." In upholding Missouri's viability-testing provision, the Chief Justice concluded, contrary to *Roe*, that the state's interest in potential human life is compelling throughout pregnancy and that restrictive laws that "permissibly further" that interest are constitutional. A law—like the Texas statute invalidated by *Roe*—that bans all abortions would clearly "further" the state's interest in potential life. The Chief Justice's analysis, however, makes no promise that this, or indeed any other restrictive regulation, would be struck down. The plurality opinion is notable for its failure to articulate *any* rights for the women who carry the fetuses in which the state, in its view, has an interest.

The plurality is the "Opinion of the Court" because Justices Antonin Scalia and Sandra Day O'Connor separately concurred in its conclusions—for dramatically different reasons. Justice O'Connor made a determined effort to avoid, for now, casting the deciding vote to discard the *Roe* framework. Reiterating her previously expressed belief that *Roe*'s trimester framework is "problematic," she attempted to leave re-examination of *Roe* to another day by concluding that Missouri's law, read narrowly, is consistent with the constitutional standards set forth in *Roe* in that no "undue burden" is imposed on a woman's right to choose. In effect, her vote created a majority on the Court for abdicating the judicial duty to review strictly legislation that infringes on the fundamental right recognized in *Roe*. Justice Scalia, by contrast, concurred because he would entirely overrule *Roe*. His opinion is a frontal attack on Justice O'Connor and the plurality for failing to overrule *Roe* now.

In a moving dissent filled with despair and foreboding, Justice Blackmun, joined by the remaining Justices, with Justice John Paul Stevens concurring in a separate dissent, mourned the Constitution's failed promise to women and deplored the callousness with which "the plurality discards a landmark case . . . and casts into darkness the hopes and visions of every woman in this country who had come to believe that the Constitution guaranteed her the right to exercise some control over her unique ability to bear children."

The Court's decision in *Webster* is indeed a crushing setback for women, for privacy and for choice. In Missouri and in those states that enact similar legislation, *Webster* will eliminate access to abortions for poor women, who rely on public hospitals for primary medical care; it will open the door to forced Caesarean sections, incarceration and other efforts to regulate women's behavior and choices with the alleged intent of protecting the fetus; and it will increase the costs and risks of second-trimester abortions, sought more often by the poor and the young. Further, the plurality's elevation of fetal interests, the veritable promise by five Justices to re-examine even *Roe*'s core principle in the future and the Court's decision to hear three more abortion cases next term make *Webster* a prelude instead of what many had hoped would be the final act.

Ironically, Justice Scalia joined the pro-choice minority in decrying the Court's failure to address the central issue once and for all: Will a woman's right to terminate pregnancy continue to be fundamental and subject to the most exacting standard of constitutional protection—or not? The Court's effort to dodge this question in *Webster* places the future of the constitutional right recognized in *Roe* in a state of what Justice Scalia termed "chaos that is evident to anyone who can read and count." While abortion remains legal and constitutional today, with *Webster* the Court has invited states to test the outer limits of their increased regulatory power. The availability of abortion will now be hostage to the vicissitudes of politics in the fifty states.

Although the *Webster* case all but slams the door on any true constitutional protection of reproductive freedom in the courts, it portends a new chapter in women's struggle for autonomy and equality—one of activism instead of complacency, of grass-roots and state legislative organizing instead of swift court victories. Without broad-based support for these struggles we will witness what Justice Scalia described as the disassembling of the mansion of *Roe v. Wade* "door-jamb by door-jamb."

RACHAEL PINE

Rachael Pine is a staff attorney for the Reproductive Freedom Project of the American Civil Liberties Union.

NOTE

With this issue, *The Nation* begins its summer schedule, during which the magazine will come out every other week.

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BEAT THE DEVIL.

ALEXANDER COCKBURN

All in Their Family

There's probably no newspaper in the corporate mainstream that has not, at one time or another, whacked the black poor on the head with the bludgeon of Senator Pat Moynihan's views: the black family's "tangle of pathology," the "internal" nature of the black poor's problems, hence the need for self-help by the black poor and for merciless tough-mindedness on the part of whites.

The notion that poor people bring their suffering upon themselves is certainly a lot older than Senator Moynihan, but it's hard to think of another North American over the past quarter-century who has given the rich and their agents so much assistance in the task of keeping it respectably at the forefront of their minds. Anyone wanting to review the promotion and durability of the Moynihan thesis at the all-important level of editorial page, news column and TV discussion can now turn to Carl Ginsburg's excellent *Race and Media*, to be published this summer by the Institute for Media Analysis (143 West 4th Street, New York, NY 10012, $6), in whose literature I am listed as an adviser. What follows is drawn entirely from his monograph.

Moynihan was at the Labor Department when he and his team drafted "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action" and injected it into the nation's bloodstream in 1965, at precisely the moment the propertied class needed to be let off the hook. Think about poverty, the report said, and you have to think about the black family. No meaningful change is possible until that family is strengthened "from within." In other words, Pauper, heal thyself!

Moynihan's thesis first crept into executive discourse on June 4, 1965, when President Johnson spoke at Howard University. "Negro poverty is not white poverty," Johnson told his audience. "There are differences . . . radiating painful roots into the community and into the family and nature of the individual." Moynihan had apparently sent his report to Johnson's assistant Bill Moyers, who urged it as the basis for Johnson's speech. This, as we shall see, was not the last time Moyers pressed Moynihan's thoughts upon the public. Tom Wicker's story next day on the front page of *The New York Times* praised the speech hotly, as did a *Times* editorial on June 6 and as did Mary McGrory in *The Washington Star. The Washington Post* said with ominous vagueness, "Implicit in his discussion is the fact that the government cannot reach all these sources of maladjustment, except in a remote way."

Notice the extraordinary rapidity with which these "liberals," prompted by Johnson's aides, grasped the point. In the months that followed, the chorus swelled. "Promoting self-help," *The Wall Street Journal* announced in late July, "must realistically appear as a large part of the ultimate answer." In early August, *Newsweek* was invoking Moynihan's famous phrase "tangle of pathology" apropos the black family and saying of the "Negro family problem" that "its very intimacy has excluded it from the public dialogue on civil rights; it reaches too deep into white prejudices and Negro sensitivities." (Translation: all that racist talk about shiftless blacks is true; pass the word along.)

Then came the Watts riots, in which blacks in Los Angeles rose against the oppression of a city that had been among the most segregated in the country. And there, in the hour of crisis, was the Moynihan report being hailed by Evans and Novak: "He [Moynihan] showed that broken homes, illegitimacy, and female-oriented homes were central to big city Negro problems." Note also the amazing durability of the pundit population. Wicker, McGrory and the Satanic Duo are still going strong. Take an equivalent gaggle of mid-sixties corporate leaders and you'd surely find them long since departed to meet the Grand Inquisitor.

Although Moynihan was the object of political attack, raptures in the press were undiminished. In July 1966, Thomas Meehan described his brain flatteringly in *The New York Times Magazine*: "One is in the presence of an extraordinary intellect, perhaps the most notable characteristic of which is his ability to come up with ideas that are remarkable for their simplicity," such simplicity prompting Meehan to the utterly delightful conclusion that "the real cause of the American Negro's troubles is not so much segregation, or a lack of voting power, but the circumstance that the structure of the Negro family is 'highly unstable and in many urban centers . . . approaching complete breakdown.'" Or, as the Jesuit magazine *America* put it more brusquely early in 1966, in communities displaying the characteristics of the Negro family alleged by the report, "crime, violence, unrest, disorder . . . are not only to be expected, they are very near to inevitable. And they are richly deserved." So much for the sons of Saint Ignatius. It is a useful exercise, in thinking about the report's reception, to imagine how things would have gone had its thesis been promulgated in white South Africa.

Sliding, with time, into Nixon's camp, Moynihan sharpened his message, urging that black have-nots be treated with "benign neglect" and honoring the haves as he did so in a memo to Nixon "leaked" to the press in the spring of 1970: "We have almost deliberately obscured the extraordinary progress, and commitment to progress, which the nation as a whole has made, which white America has not abandoned, and which increasingly black America is learning to make use of." From here the leap was not far to the theory that integration had achieved "irreversible" momentum, and therefore did not need any further encouragement from the nation's government or courts.

Having thus taught the ruling orders to blame the victim, Moynihan was propelled into his Senate seat in 1976 by *The New York Times*, nicely ensconced against the day of the Second Coming of his report in the Reagan years, when its comforting properties were once more in urgent demand.

After All We Did for Them

Amid the ravages of the 1982-83 recession in Reagan's first term it did not escape the attention of news editors that

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there were a lot of needy and desperate people about. By 1982 black unemployment approached 20 percent. The reasons for this were as obvious as the misery such numbers implied. Reagan's agenda, scarcely secret, was to lower the costs of production and redistribute wealth upward.

At the end of 1983 the *Baltimore Evening Sun* studied black families for three months and confided to its readers that "state and local officials describe the breakdown in black family structure as one of the biggest and most perplexing problems confronting the city." Nowhere, in any of the articles, was there a mention of economic crisis, corporate policies, management agendas or their effects on the poor. In the fall of 1984, with matchless effrontery, Moynihan descended into the valley and shot the wounded: "At long last," he told NBC News, "a new generation [of blacks] is coming along which says this is our problem and we are going to face it. And good for them."

As the 1980s advanced, so did the economic oppression of the poor, particularly the black poor. By 1987, while Reaganites extolled the breadth of general economic "recovery," black unemployment still stood at 13 percent; in 1965, the year of the report, it was 8.1. One out of every three blacks was poor. The median earnings of full-time black male workers fell 10 percent between 1979 and 1987. In the same period more than half of all new full-time jobs paid poverty wages ($11,610) for families of four. With this acceleration in misery came a corresponding rise in resentment among the haves. George Will observed that "millions of blacks are victims of many irresponsible blacks." Twenty years after Watts, from the towers of a downtown reared by dollars withheld from any urban initiative for the poor, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a glowing feature about the virtues of self-help, replete with quotations from the conservative black economist Glenn Loury, a great favorite of the haves, calling for subminimum wages for teen-agers and for enterprise zones, thus, as Ginsburg remarks, aiming to solve a situation caused by exploitation by imposing further exploitation.

The New York Times took up the theme, in a front-page article by Lena Williams on June 15, 1986, headlined "Blacks Debating a Greater Stress on Self-Reliance Instead of Aid." In a nation that has not one black C.E.O. in the top thousand corporations, Williams took the trouble to find a group of unidentified blacks asking themselves "whether racism was the cause of some of the problems confronting poor blacks, whether government aid programs had exacerbated the situation by reducing incentives to work and to keep families intact, and whether blacks themselves had to bear some of the blame." "Noticeably," she said, "Mr. Reagan has not become a focal point in the most recent discussions. Some black social scientists and political observers see that as a good sign." During this period you could read huge articles about the homeless that never once thought it fit to mention that Reagan had cut housing subsidies.

Today more black men are in jail than in college. The number of blacks attending college stands at 26 percent, down from 33 percent in 1976. College-educated black men have an unemployment rate four times greater than their white peers. In this painful hour Moynihan's constructs have been more potent than ever, and in January of 1986 got their most ecstatic reiteration in a CBS documentary by Bill Moyers, Moynihan's salesman to Lyndon Johnson.

Moyers's evocation of the "tangle of pathology," visited in this case on some black people in a poor section of Newark, was received by the haves with wild enthusiasm. The documentary, much of it eliciting from teen-agers detailed accounts of their sex lives, honed in resolutely on "personal responsibility." *The Boston Globe* called it compelling and quoted from the Moynihan report. In *The New York Times*, John Corry praised it for examining a "culturally unpopular topic." This theme of the courage of Moynihan and his epigones in grasping nettles, speaking the unspeakable, etc. is common to many articles, despite the obvious fact that the themes of the report were very popular with the dispensing classes, and that a courageous approach would have been to say that the condition of the poor and of many black Americans in particular was due to capitalism and the political agenda of the overclass. ("Underclass," an essentialist category, like underworld, became very popular in the Reagan years. "Overclass" somehow never caught on.)

It's Just the Way They Are

By 1988, Pete Hamill was writing in *Esquire* that "there is very little now that whites can do in a direct way for the maimed and hurting citizens of the Underclass." In February of 1989, Morton Kondracke wrote in *The New Republic* that "the crisis of the underclass is so great that probably nothing short of a spiritual renewal in black America would really solve the problem." (Calls by Jesse Jackson for such a spiritual and political renewal had earlier excited Kondracke to torrents of abuse.) In *The Washington Post* in April, Richard Cohen called for a "war" in the inner city and denounced the "pathetic lassitude" of "the underclass" which militates against "the dignity of honest work, the chance to move up the ladder." Why the appeals to war, now symbolized in South Central Los Angeles by police battering rams? What's dignified about cleaning toilets in downtown hotels? Where's the ladder and the robust black middle class?—largely a myth fostered by government to delude white journalists that all blacks can make it if they only try, along the lines of *Stand and Deliver*, reassurance against the reality of class as destiny. In fact, as Ginsburg points out, "blacks have been more 'self-reliant,' by any measure of social adaptability, having survived *despite* government *and* corporate policies aimed at perpetuating their impoverishment."

After the rape of a white woman in Central Park by black and Latino youths, Edwin Yoder wrote in *The Washington Post* that their actions could not be explained by "environmental factors." Yoder preferred "the theological alternative to sociological or economic determinism." Thus do we come to Original Sin and Noah's drunken curse on the children of Ham. Maybe in his hours of community service among the poor, Oliver North can further expound the resonances of Holy Writ to such black families as have survived the Moynihan-fueled onslaughts of his former employer.

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ARTICLES.

INTRODUCTION

The Burden Of History

JEWELL HANDY GRESHAM AND MARGARET B. WILKERSON

Our children are being destroyed, and we are in grave danger. And everybody knows it. Everybody. —*Toni Morrison*

Three times in the history of this Republic, a momentous event occurred which provided an opportunity for a national course of action to redress the injustices suffered by the descendants of African peoples in this land.

The first was the Revolutionary War, which resulted in the making of the Constitution; the second, the Civil War, was followed by the shaping of Reconstruction; and the third was the mid-twentieth-century civil rights movement, which made possible a second reconstruction to redress the failures of the first.

Each time the challenge was not met.

On the failure of the first, historian Leon Litwack observed in his 1987 presidential address to the Organization of American Historians on "The Bicentennial and the Afro-American Experience":

> It had been the genius of the Founding Fathers to sanction, protect, and reinforce the enslavement of black men and women in the same document that promised to "establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity . . . promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty" to Americans. It had been the genius of the founders to build safeguards for slavery into the Constitution without even mentioning slavery by name. The legitimization of slavery was the price of the new federal union.

Sixty-five years after the Civil War, writing on Reconstruction in the 1930s, W.E.B. Du Bois conducted a massive examination of the historical literature on slavery and the post–Civil War era. He came away "literally aghast" at what white scholars had done, not only to an entire people but to the integrity of the subject matter and disciplines of study. It was, he wrote, "one of the most stupendous efforts the world ever saw to discredit human beings, an effort involving universities, history, science, social life and religion."

Were Du Bois alive today, only two decades after the black revolution of the 1950s and 1960s, he would be equally aghast. To his list of those seeking to discredit African-Americans he would add politicians at all levels of government, academic and journalistic opinion molders, heavily corporate-endowed think tanks and an assortment of others. Litwack observes:

> The significance of race in the American past can scarcely be exaggerated. Those who seek to diminish its critical role invariably dismiss too much of history—the depth, the persistence, the pervasiveness, the centrality of race in American society, the countless ways in which racism has embedded itself in the culture, how it adapts to changes in laws and public attitudes, assuming different guises as the occasion demands.

The distinguished women who are contributors to this issue were asked to write from their own individual experiences on a particular topic related to the latest era of relentless trashing of black men, women and children as scapegoats for the national ills, amounting to a psychic assault no people should be asked to endure.

This issue makes no attempt to be comprehensive relative to all of the myths concocted about the black experience or of the present wretched conditions of masses of black Americans. On the latter, much is annually addressed by such organizations as the Urban League on the State of Black America, the Children's Defense Fund and the National Black Child Development Institute on the plight of children (and comprehensive remedial programs) and numerous others. The areas of deep concern to African-Americans, in any case, are far too many and too complicated for any small group of writers to venture to address the whole without the accompanying voices of men and women from across the spectrum of the black community.

Among the topics being addressed, two of critical importance relating to black health and crime (apart from drugs) are not being discussed independently. Regarding black health, the grim statistics extending from birth to an often too-early grave are readily available elsewhere. Their implications are genocidal. The 1988 release of a report by the National Center for Health Statistics showing a decline of the life span of American blacks for the second year in a row is a case in point. No other industrial nation in the world shows a decline in the life expectancy of a segment of its population for two consecutive years!

Crime in America involves economic, political, social, mystical and simultaneously fearful and titillating phenomena, and African-Americans are most often victims before they are perpetrators. It is therefore impossible for many black Americans to look upon the crisis of crime in America as it affects black people and the society at large without exploring the basic question: Who are the real criminals?

We believe that the desperate plight of the masses of black infants, children and youth in America represents a

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Jewell Handy Gresham, an English professor, is currently working on a book treating the historical relationships of the black and women's movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Margaret B. Wilkerson is a professor and chair of the Afro-American Studies Department at the University of California, Berkeley. She is a former director of Berkeley's Center for the Study, Education and Advancement of Women, and is currently writing a literary biography of playwright Lorraine Hansberry. Gresham and Wilkerson are the guest editors of this special issue.

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crime against humanity, and it is this intolerable set of circumstances in all its dimensions that we ask the nation to address NOW.

This issue therefore ends with a "Challenge to the Nation for the Year 2000." To pose it, we chose artist/activist Ossie Davis, known and beloved by many across the country for his dedicated artistry as a stage and screen actor, writer and television host, and for his commitment to positive social change that has long led him to play a central role in the affairs of black people and the nation.

In a special issue to which black women are the contributors, what could be more fitting than the choice of an African-American father beloved by innumerable numbers of people to deliver a challenge to society on behalf of our children. Happily, the value system of the man and the people made it unnecessary to request that he make his appeal as well on behalf of all members of the human race. □

WHITE PATRIARCHAL SUPREMACY

The Politics of Family in America

JEWELL HANDY GRESHAM

The past is not dead. It's not even past.

—William Faulkner

In April 1844, Secretary of State John Calhoun, the pre-eminent Southern philosopher of States' rights, directed a letter to the British ambassador in Washington attesting that where blacks and whites existed in the same society, slavery was the natural result. Wherever the states changed that providential relationship, the blacks invariably degenerated "into vice and pauperism accompanied by the bodily and mental afflictions incident thereto—deafness, blindness, insanity, and idiocy." In the slave states, in contrast, the blacks improved greatly "in number, comfort, intelligence, and morals."

To prove his point, Calhoun supplied statistics from the 1840 census. The data showed a shocking rate of black insanity in New England: one out of every fourteen in Maine, every twenty-eight in New Hampshire, every forty-three in Massachusetts, etc. The overall figure for the North was almost ten times the rate in the South, where only one "lunatic" for every 1,309 blacks was shown in Virginia, one in 2,447 in South Carolina, etc.

At the time Calhoun wrote that letter, one of the country's leading newspapers had just broken the scandal of the plot by President Tyler's Administration to annex Texas as slave territory—a potential constitutional crisis certain to inflame the bitter North-South conflict. In that context, Calhoun's statistics were intended less for the British than for Congress, to which he forwarded copies.

There was only one flaw in his argument: The figures were false. Dr. Edward Jarvis of Massachusetts General Hospital, a leading specialist in the incidence of insanity, immediately challenged them. Joined by the prestigious American Statistical Association, Jarvis conducted an exhaustive study of every town and county in the free states in which black insanity had been reported by the Census Bureau. In case after case, the number of "insane" blacks proved larger than the state's total black population!

The A.S.A.'s comprehensive study—forwarded to former President John Quincy Adams in the House of Representatives—concluded that "it would have been far better to have no census at all, than such a one as has been published" and urged Congress either to correct the data or "discard or disown" it "as the good of the country . . . and as justice and humanity shall demand." But when Adams, as recorded in his diary, confronted Calhoun at the State Department, the latter "answered like a true slavemonger. . . . He writhed like a trodden rattlesnake on the exposure of his false report to the House . . . and finally said that where there were so many errors they balanced one another, and led to the same conclusion as if they were all correct." The A.S.A. report—blocked by the Speaker the and proslavery majority in the House—never reached the floor.

While these developments unfolded, Southern slaves were of course in no position to challenge the claims in which their welfare was critical. Nor did the free blacks of New York City under the leadership of the distinguished black physician/abolitionist James McCune Smith stand a chance of having their memorial to Congress protesting the "calumnies against free people of color" recognized. For those who held political power, it was imperative that blacks simply not exist except as objects, and the truth or falsity of what was said was beside the point. What mattered, then as now, was not the *facts* but only that the semblance of "substance" be provided for a time sufficient to confuse the issue and carry the day.

'The Need to Segregate or Quarantine a Race'

After the Civil War, the Calhoun view of the inherent degeneracy of blacks, which held that they could not survive outside slavery, was tenaciously clung to by the outnumbered whites of Mississippi. In 1865 the *Meridian Clarion* asserted with unconcealed satisfaction that the black race was doomed: "A hundred years is a long time to one man; but to a nation or a race, it is but a limited period. Well, in that time the negro will be dead."

In due course, Mississippi produced figures to prove it: The 1866 state census showed a more than 12 percent decline in the black population. Unfortunately for the prophets, however, this data was as accurate as Calhoun's: The 1870 Federal census showed an *increase* of more than 7,000, which turned out to be an undercount of between 50,000 and 75,000, corrected in the 1880 Federal figures.

Nonetheless, in the 1880s, the Reverend C.K. Marshall, the most prominent preacher in the state, predicted that "by January, 1920 . . . except for a few old people [who] will linger as the Cherokees do on their reservation . . . the colored population of the south will scarcely be counted."

With the passage of more years without apparent visible

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diminution in black ranks, however, white theories of a built-in biological solution to the black "problem" obviously had to be augmented. In *The Plantation Negro as Freeman* (1889), the historian Philip A. Bruce used the black family as a device for attacking all blacks. Bruce, the scion of a former Virginia slaveowner, simply advanced Calhoun's thesis: With the end of slavery, the loss of white "supervision" led to a severe and menacing deterioration in blacks' social and moral condition. The black family as such did not exist, he announced; black children, accordingly, were born into a state of moral degeneracy.

Bruce viciously castigated black women. Alluding to the alleged propensity of black men to rape white women, he asserted that they found "something strangely alluring and seductive . . . in the appearance of a white woman" because of the "wantonness of the women of his own race." The "fact" that black women failed to complain of being raped by men of their race counted as "strong proof of the sexual laxness of plantation women as a class."

Herbert Gutman called Bruce's work perhaps the most important connecting link between the "popular" views of African-American degeneracy in the 1880s and the supportive pseudoscientific works of the ensuing decades before World War I. These latter writings rested heavily on the pseudoscientific data of Social Darwinism—the doctrine of survival of the fittest. The historian George Frederickson explains the relevance of such theories in his book *The Black Image in the White Mind*:

> If the blacks were a degenerating race with no future, the problem ceased to be one of how to prepare them for citizenship or even how to make them more productive and useful members of the community. The new prognosis pointed rather to the need to segregate or quarantine a race liable to be a source of contamination and social danger to the white community, as it sank ever deeper into the slough of disease, vice, and criminality.

The Device Updated

It was against these brutally repressive rationalizations still undergirding the Southern apartheid system after World War II that the civil rights revolution of the 1950s and 1960s erupted. And it was at the climactic stages of that struggle that Labor Department official Daniel Patrick Moynihan conceived, in December 1964, his supposedly secret "internal memorandum" on the black family.

Whether Moynihan knew his history or not, his report served the time-tested purpose: Whenever the system is in crisis (or shows signs of becoming transformed); whenever blacks get restless (or show strength); whenever whites in significant numbers show signs of coming together with blacks to confront their mutual problems (or enemies), the trick is to shift the focus from the real struggle for political and economic empowerment to black "crime," degeneracy, pathology and—in Moynihan's innovative twist—the "deterioration" of the black family (previously defined as nonexistent!).

Moynihan's report was subtitled "The Case for National Action." But just how much serious "action" it intended was made plain in the author's next "internal memo"—this time to Richard Nixon—counseling "benign neglect."

In the light of subsequent events it is interesting to discover in *Pat,* the Senator's biography, that it was presidential assistant Bill Moyers who, in May 1965, first brought the black family report, until then ignored, to Lyndon Johnson's attention and arranged for the President to deliver a major policy speech based on it.

Curiously, the Moyers-arranged speech bypassed all agencies of the government set up to aid the passage of the President's civil rights agenda. It was delivered at the graduation exercises of Howard University before an overwhelmingly black audience of thousands of students, parents, friends and dignitaries. Apparently few observers among the editors, journalists and scholars present found what Johnson did reprehensible. Howard was one of the colleges that had sent a sizable contingent of students into the revolutionary *nonviolent* Southern struggle which at that moment was galvanizing, inspiring and, in a thousand unforeseeable ways, transforming the nation. Before the young people whom he should have congratulated for the extraordinary example of

DRAWINGS BY THERESA KING

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sacrifice and heroism they were setting, the President emphasized the "historical" degenerate state of the families from which they came!

True, words of noble intent were there (as they were in Moynihan's original), and they heartened many. But so were the declarations of black degeneracy that reinforced the racism of many more and signaled the open-door policy for what was to come. Through the summer, however, the "secret" Moynihan report continued to be leaked to selected journalists. Then came the event that cemented its impact. Ten days after the August passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Watts exploded—and in a mad scramble for instant wisdom, journalists turned to the black family report and drew on its conclusions as explanations for the violent civil disorders.

What did it explain? What were the causes of Watts and the succeeding ghetto rebellions? Not, as the Kerner commission concluded in 1967, the division of America into two societies, separate and unequal. Not historical white racism, Depression-level unemployment and the intolerable conditions of the ghetto that cut short the dreams and lives of millions of black men, women and children. Not at all. "Ours is a society," offered Moynihan, "which presumes male leadership in private and public affairs. . . . A subculture such as that of the Negro American, in which this is not the pattern, is placed at a distinct disadvantage." To overcome that disadvantage, he said, the malaise of the black family, characterized by the unnatural dominance of a "black matriarchy," had to be cured.

In contrast, Moynihan wrote: *"The white family has achieved a high degree of stability and is maintaining that stability."* (Emphasis added.) Against the backdrop of the next twenty-five years, this declaration would be hilarious were it not for the fact that, for untold millions of *white* working women—divorced, single and joint providers—the idealized patriarchal structure held up as an icon had always been a myth! Indeed, even as Moynihan wrote the words, the modern women's movement for equal rights and a sense of selfhood, submerged under the centuries-old domination of that very model, was being forged in the crucible of the civil rights struggle.

Those who found the Moynihan report useful were presumably unaware that the archetypal sexism on which it rests is inextricable from its racism. At any rate, the report signaled, at the very height of the civil rights movement, that Northern whites would pick up where the South was forced to leave off in blocking the long black struggle for parity with whites in American life.

Line of Descent

On January 25, 1986, Bill Moyers, Moynihan's original booster, invoked the full power of a prime-time, two-hour CBS Special Report to beam the old theme into millions of homes. The title: *The Vanishing Black Family—Crisis in Black America* (shades of the old Mississippi *Meridian Clarion*!). The East Texan, in sympathetic "liberal" guise, took cameras into a Newark, New Jersey, housing project for an "intimate" portrait of black teen-age welfare mothers, sexually irresponsible if not criminal youth, a smiling black male "superstud," and pervasive pathology all around. Moyers's report was directed not at the cause of the plight of the people whose confidences he elicited. Viewers were shown, rather, a pathology in black America so overwhelming and irredeemable as to leave the panel of blacks brought in at the end to "discuss" the subject helpless to dissipate the impact of the carefully selected imagery.

The result, whatever sympathy toward individual victims white viewers might have felt, and whatever responsibilities some might acknowledge that America has for its racist "past," could only be: First, to utterly terrify most as to the very nature of their fellow black citizens by reinforcing, with "liberal" authority, the most archetypal of racist myths, fears and stereotypes—a picture of "jungle" immorality and degeneracy, inarticulateness and sloth so rife that the onlookers could actually forget the terrible national corruption, wholesale public and private immorality, and other massive problems about them, in horrified fascination with the doings of these Others. And second, to make the situation seem so hopeless that "realistically" there is nothing to be done about it anyway. Racism is no longer the problem,

MAMAS AND SUPERSTUDS

Raw and uncontrolled sex is at the root of the Black family problem. This is the most enduring of all lies about Blacks, and sociologists and historians froth at the mouth and strain at the leash of synonymity ("riotous debauchery," "unbridled passions," "wild and primitive emotions") in passionate attempts to express this academic and political voyeurism. For most, if not almost all, critics of the Black family, there is always at the back of the mind this myth, this image of Black America as Babylon, where the Studs and Sapphires are *always* making babies, where—in the words of the myth—"They do it, honey, right out in the middle of the streets." And one of the most challenging problems we face is confronting scholars, journalists and politicians, who have repeatedly used the Black family to exorcise the demons of their own sexuality and the guilt of their complicity in oppression. What makes this so difficult is that we are dealing here with a magical idea that is impervious to "facts." There are, in fact, no facts in this area, for there has never been a systematic analysis of the sexual differences between American Blacks and American Whites. And the few facts we have contradict the supersex theory of Black history and suggest that the differences between racial groups are relatively small, especially when you correct for economic and historical differences. More to the point, Blacks, according to the statistics, are not even in the running in the areas of wife-swapping and other experiments of the sexual revolution.

—Lerone Bennett Jr.
Ebony, August 1986

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self-destructiveness is. And if that is so, why continue to throw good taxpayer dollars after bad? In the words of the older black woman selected by Moyers to deliver the clincher at the end: "If Martin Luther King were alive, he would not be talking about the things I think he was talking about—labor and all that. He would be talking about the black family."

It is hard to believe that it was simply bad taste that led CBS to choose the very week of the first national celebration of King's birthday to televise his fellow Southerner's broadside. African-Americans had hardly had a moment to savor the honor to the martyred black minister before their psyches were so powerfully assaulted.

The extent of the commonplace manner in which deep-seated black response is blocked out from the larger society may be seen in several postscripts to the broadcast beginning when the National Black Leadership Roundtable, comprising the chief executive officers of more than 300 national black organizations, directed a detailed letter to CBS to protest the "untimely and indeed . . . suspect" airing of an "unbalanced, unfair and frequently salacious" documentary.

The N.B.L.R. challenged the implication "that the *only* legitimate and sanctioned family form is nuclear and patriarchal," and observed:

> One was left with the impression that black families generally do not have fathers in the home, but there was no serious examination of the reasons for the absence of the father within some black families. The unconscionable high levels of unemployment, underemployment, imprisonment, drug addiction and mortality among black men—effects of an economy which does not fully respond to the employment needs of all Americans—all play a role. . . . Single-parent families then, are not, as implied . . . the result of "immorality" or promiscuity, but rather are adaptive responses to economic and social forces.

Two months later CBS vice president of public affairs broadcasts Eric Ober, speaking for Moyers, replied. He refused to meet with Walter Fauntroy, N.B.L.R. president, or "any member of your group." And to the N.B.L.R. query as to what "experts" had been consulted within the black community, he replied that the "experts we consulted were primarily officials of *the Department of the Census*." (Emphasis added.) Little did he know the history.

The reinforcing white response was predictable. In early 1987, the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism gave its highest award in broadcast journalism—the Alfred I. DuPont-Columbia University Gold Baton for the "program judged to have made the greatest contribution to the public's understanding of an important issue"—to CBS News for the Moyers Special Report on "the disintegration of black family life."

Moyers's contribution lies not only in his restoration to primacy of old images through the power of television but in his encouragement of the willingness, indeed the eagerness, of large numbers of white Americans to have all that he portrayed be true at any cost so that the victims might deserve their fate. Such is the depth of the entrenched white desire to avoid facing the society's culpability for creating and main-

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taining the two ever more unequal "societies" the Kerner report asked us to face up to a generation before.

Restraining the 'Darker Impulses'

In such a climate, it is not surprising that politicians like "centrist" Democrat Charles Robb, L.B.J.'s son-in-law and former Virginia Governor, now Senator, promptly picked up Moyers's cue. Once upon a time, black people were the victims of white racism, Robb conceded in his keynote speech to a conference on the Johnson presidency. But that time has passed. "It's time to shift the primary focus from racism, the traditional enemy from without, to self-defeating patterns of behavior, the new enemy within."

Approval by establishment opinion makers was swift to follow. A *New York Times* editorial endorsed Robb's brand of "hard truth," and journalists flung the name of the messenger into the public arena as a worthy candidate for President.

In such a climate, the level of public tolerance of the intolerable increased. Even years before, there had been little reaction when, at a speech in New Orleans to the International Association of Chiefs of Police, President Reagan had drawn "applause and some whoops of approval" for remarks that included the following:

> It has occurred to me that the root causes of our . . . growth of government and the decay of the economy . . . can be traced to many of the same sources of the crime problem. . . . Many of the social thinkers of the 1950s and '60s who discussed crime only in the context of disadvantaged childhoods and poverty-stricken neighborhoods were the same people who thought that massive government spending could wipe away our social ills. The underlying premise in both cases was a belief that there was nothing permanent or absolute about any man's nature—that he was a product of his material environment, and that by changing that environment . . . we could . . . usher in a great new era. The solution to the crime problem will not be found in the social worker's files, the psychiatrist's notes or the bureaucrat's budget. . . . Only our deep moral values and strong institutions can hold back that jungle and restrain the darker impulses of human nature.

Most black people knew immediately of which "jungle" and whose "darker impulses" Reagan was speaking, and that his words represented a not-so-subtle invitation to white-against-black terror.

Reagan's position was a *theological* one in the American Calvinist tradition, a division of the world into good and evil, with a scapegoat selected to serve as "sacrificial animal upon whose back the burden of unwanted evils is ritualistically loaded," in Kenneth Burke's definition. Through such projections, the culture thus expiates its sins and receives absolution.

The Reagan rhetoric directed to the assembled police officers was a direct corollary of his theological labeling of the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" (a remark now implicitly withdrawn in the case of the Russians, but not that of African-Americans!). It indicates how high is the level of responsibility for nationwide police practices of treating black Americans as if they are foreign enemies and, with sickening regularity, eliminating many. And it also indicates the treatment of a variety of foreign "enemies"—now mostly desperately struggling Third World countries—on the basis of a "moral" stance rooted in the myths of a fatalistically corrupt domestic system.

It is on this level that the politics of family—which is to say the politics of power and domination—threatens not only domestic but world social, political and economic order.

It is likewise on this level that the political manipulation of the intermingled race/sex/religion syndrome of the society is irrevocably wedded to violence; in its ultimate form, militaristic. For the identities of those who create the monsters in the mind (Toni Morrison calls the creations "grinning apes in the head") require ever vigilant attention to finding and confronting replicas in the external world.

It is this system of macho ethics that was successfully drawn upon in George Bush's march to the White House. True to tradition, the ultimate scapegoat tapped was a black male, the rapist Willie Horton (whether real or fancied does not traditionally matter), projected before millions via television and print.

Those who make use of such a repugnant and dangerous tactic—among them South Carolina's Lee Atwater, now chair of the Republican National Committee, and Texan James Baker 3d—know these traditions well. And they know further that it is not possible for the image of a black man accused of rape to be flashed before black Americans by white men independent of the psychic association for blacks with lynchings. After the election, *The New York Times* not only contributed the verdict to history that the Bush campaign was "tough and effective," this pre-eminent sheet augmented that judgment with strident editorial criticism of black students at Howard for their successful protest action when Lee Atwater was suddenly named to the University's Board of Trustees.

While white perception of black criminality is readily evoked, white awareness of black anger or anguish has been not only historically avoided but, on the deepest psychic levels, guarded against. Existentially, the concept of black people as vulnerable human beings who sustain pain and love and hatreds and fears and joy and sorrows and degradations and triumphs is not yet permitted in the national consciousness. Hence the constant need of the dominant society, in age after age, to reinforce linguistic and ritualistic symbols that deny black humanity.

Historically, white terror is the sustaining principle of the system. Whether overtly applied or covertly threatened, not only has this basic device of subjugation never been nationally rejected, it has, on the contrary, always been sanctioned.

The Family as Unifying Principle

A few weeks after his election, George Bush addressed the Republican Governors Association in Alabama where, some months before, several black legislators had been arrested for trying to remove the Confederate Flag from above the State Capitol, presided over by Republican Governor Guy Hunt. The theme of the conference—"Century of the

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States"—resurrected overtones of Calhoun's old brand of States' rights. To this audience, a smiling Bush announced that building more prisons was a major domestic priority of his Administration (on education, he emphasized that the initiative would be left up to the states).

Only a few weeks later a smiling Bush assured a black gathering celebrating the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr. that he is committed to the fulfillment of King's dream of America, just as they are. That King's dream does not include the construction of prisons is immaterial. In the prevailing political realm, language does not matter: Symbols are all.

However, the renewed focus on the black family has introduced a sleeper. For the very technology of communication which carries the message of black pathology to white people conveys to blacks the unmistakable message that once again the dominant culture needs the assurance that black pathology prevails. Clearly, we must bestir ourselves to face the threat. Ironically, we have been handed a mighty weapon. To millions of ordinary human beings the family is not a symbol to be manipulated by opportunistic politicians but the essential nurturing unit from which they draw their being. For African-Americans (and for hundreds of millions of others), it is the institution around which our historical memories cling. Through the extended family of mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers, uncles and aunts, cousins and unsung numbers of others who simply "mothered" parentless children, black people "got over."

It is unbelievable that on the eve of the twenty-first century those who are still fashioning the political formula for WHO and WHAT make a family remain overwhelmingly male!

But it is women who give birth, and children who represent the one essential entity which must exist if the family does. It is simply inconceivable that women, that society, can any longer allow men to retain almost exclusive domain over the vital process of defining the human family.

The concept of "family" can and should be a unifying, rather than divisive, principle. Given the weight of U.S. history that we uniquely bear, black women should step forth collectively not only as blacks but as women, in the name of our lost children throughout history—including most urgently the present generation. One of the first steps is to confront, in all their ramifications, the racist/sexist myths historically concocted by opportunistic, ruthless or naïve white males in the interests of white-over-black and male-over-female dominance.

Never again should the future of black children—or children anywhere in the world—be left in such hands! □

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LEGACY OF THE 1960s

The Great Society Didn't Fail

MARGARET BURNHAM

The Great Society did not fail. It was abandoned. . . . Johnson's early emphasis on poverty, civil rights, and medical care led many critics to assimilate the Great Society to the goals of traditional, New Deal liberalism, and then to cite its failure in order to prove the obsolescence of the liberal tradition. —*Richard N. Goodwin*
Kennedy-Johnson speechwriter who coined the term "the Great Society," in Remembering America: A Voice From the Sixties, *1988*

At the time the extraordinary progression of events now called the civil rights movement was initiated in 1955 by Rosa Parks's defiant refusal to yield her seat on a segregated Montgomery, Alabama, bus, U.S. society was organized on the basis of a racial apartheid system in Southern states and a corollary order of racially discriminatory barriers in most of the Northern ones.

Despite decades of heroic effort in the courts (culminating in a few isolated triumphs) by such organizations as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, most of the race-based discriminatory laws were still in place when Parks took her stand. Not, in short, until the black Southern nonviolent uprising of the 1950s and 1960s—followed by riots in the great Northern ghettos—were measures taken by the Federal government to render null and void all laws securing racially oppressive patterns of behavior in American life.

If the United States can stand before the world today with legalized apartheid within its borders eradicated, that fact is the legacy of the thousands who fought the battle in the South, and the blacks and whites across the country who fought with or supported them. Many people died in that struggle, which former Attorney General Ramsey Clark has rightly called "the noblest quest of the American people in our times."

The entire idea of a Great Society was a response to this people's movement, just as Richard Nixon's programs—the

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Comprehensive Employment Training Administration and the like—reflected the Northern insurrections. Had nothing else come out of the body of legislation enacted under the rubric of John Kennedy's War on Poverty and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, it would still not be possible to call any era that heralded the end of legalized apartheid in the United States a failure. How telling that few of the most vocal critics of the 1960s choose to laud it.

Attention having been duly paid here, the caveat must immediately follow that if anyone proceeds today under the impression that the term "Great Society" ever referred to a massive program of measures designed fundamentally to address the domestic problems of race and poverty, that person should be promptly told the reality. No such agenda ever existed. As historic as the attempt was, only bits and pieces of innovative programs were enacted—Head Start and the Job Corps, for example—representing a piecemeal rather than a systematic approach.

Even so, the resulting benefit for tens of thousands of human beings historically deprived of entry to social, political and economic channels giving promise of a better life was significant, as were the benefits to the stability of the society. Even if the amelioration effected still left the black masses (and others of the poor) far from redeemed, it also left them less inclined to abandon hope that the mythic American promises extended to black people too.

What the Great Society affirmed was the responsibility of the Federal government to take measures necessary to bring into the social and economic mainstream any segment of the people historically excluded. In the context of the struggle marking the era, this meant specifically—though not exclusively—black people.

An ostensible commitment to this goal was evidenced by the implementation of such programs as compensatory education and training, and by the priority given to civil rights, affirmative action and regulatory legislation. Presidents Nixon and Gerald Ford, following Kennedy and Johnson, found it pragmatically necessary to acknowledge the validity of government's role in facilitating the economic well-being of its citizens—even as Nixon initiated private measures to forestall black advances.

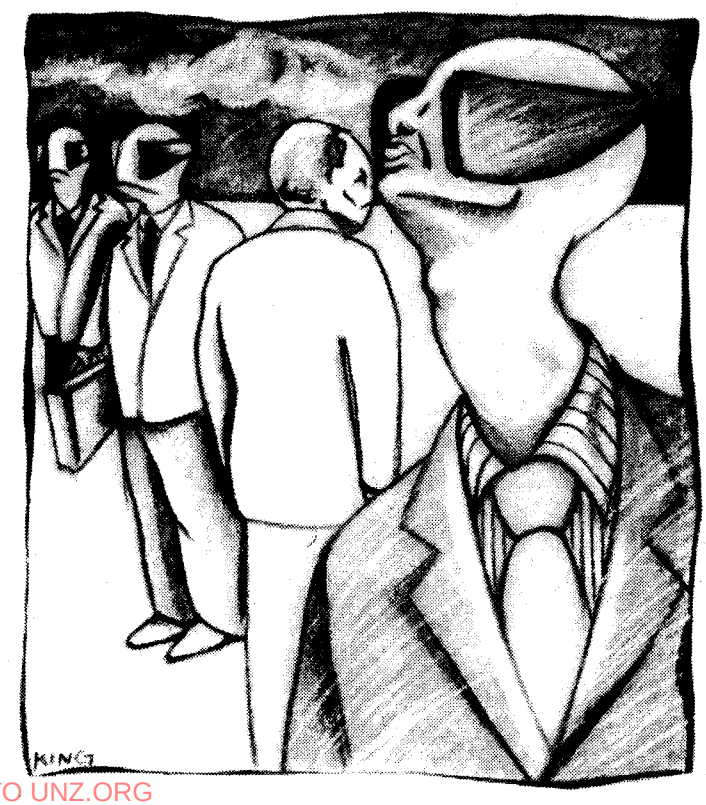
Ronald Reagan was the first President since the advent of the New Deal to call for the dismantling of these domestic social programs. In his 1982 State of the Union Address, he could point to more than $44 billion in cuts in social spending, with an additional $19 billion planned. Asserting that he had inherited a system in which valuable resources were "going not to the needy but to the greedy," the President vowed that his economic program would "protect the needy while it triggers a recovery that will benefit all Americans."

Reagan's years in office are now history. If the economic policies he put into operation have benefited all Americans, that lesson has been lost on the millions of the old and newly dispossessed.

The consequences of Reagan's policies can be traced with precision. His elimination of a single program—CETA—meant the loss of tens of thousands of job opportunities for disadvantaged youth (and members of the middle class who infiltrated the program). That number was small compared to what was needed, but to it must be added the generation that grew from childhood to adolescence during the eight years of Reagan's reign. The results are currently reflected in the calamitous unemployment rates and desperate plight of black youths who are ineligible for the "safety net" Reagan promised to retain. The loss of CETA—plus massive cuts in job training programs—meant, for many, loss of the opportunity to enter the economic mainstream. Similarly—age and race aside—as the military budget swelled to $1 trillion over eight years, cutbacks in food stamps and related nutritional programs affecting both the working poor and the unemployed had a disastrous effect. The relentless attacks on these and other social programs have led directly to sharp increases in numbers of the hungry, the homeless, the jobless and, inevitably under such circumstances, the crime-ridden and terrified.

Many white middle-class citizens who are quick to join in the chorus of indignant voices castigating Great Society programs that help the poor would fight to keep the measures resulting from the civil rights movement that benefit them. When the Reagan Administration tried to eliminate or limit the educational acts pushed through by the Johnson Administration, there was a great hue and cry. Nor are such vitally important cultural institutions as the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, which offer special channels of opportunity to academicians, artists and intellectuals, normally subjected to catcalls, though they, too, have been targeted for budget cuts.

Medicare, the subsidized national health insurance for the elderly that is a major legacy of the 1960s, takes a substantial slice of the budgetary pie for domestic spending: at recent count, more than eight times the 2 percent allocated for Aid



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to Families with Dependent Children (A.F.D.C.), or "welfare freeloaders," as the recipients are so commonly regarded. Even Medicaid, its poor cousin, receives more than twice A.F.D.C.'s share. But whites who benefit from national health insurance rarely know that it is a byproduct of the civil rights movement.

Traditionally, these programs have become relatively untouchable, while it is the programs that are perceived as helping blacks that are castigated. The most acute condemnation is reserved for black teen-age A.F.D.C. mothers, who are unable to make a case for themselves or to represent very much of a political threat. Among the programs of the 1960s of which blacks have been the primary beneficiaries, only Head Start is generally considered a success, though this program does not cover even half the eligible children.

Community action programs in particular have taken a severe beating. Initially, the intellectuals who dealt with the issues of poverty thought that what we now call "self-help"—that is, community initiative—could be promoted by having people who live in the community—the poor—come together with government encouragement to design activities and place pressure on the system to respond to them.

It was too good an idea to be permitted to live: The record shows that as soon as community action projects were organized and the people started responding, many of the proponents of the new programs turned tail. They came to understand that once the poor got together they might realize that nobody was really going to solve their problems. Once they understood that—and if they were given support and encouragement in organizing—they might demand more fundamental changes.

In point of fact, the policy-makers—politicians, academics and government officials—knew all along that the economy was not going to generate enough jobs to solve the problems of blacks and poor people. Everybody knew this, including the poor. But at least government could *appear* to be helping, and some people might be lifted from poverty in the process. At the same time, the tensions stimulated both by the movement in the South and by the rebellions in the Northern cities could be defused. The objective thus became to provide enough financial support for people to be maintained—and contained—without making too much noise. Job training might be given to some in the hope that they might eventually find some employment and so that, in any case, the claim could be made that something was being done to give them skills. Education of a sort might also pay off in the long run.

Thus, the real question of the 1960s and 1970s became: How do you maintain the poor? How do you preserve stability while doing as much as possible for *some* people in the hope they will be helped, and help keep others quiet? The only alternative was to do what no one in government was prepared to do: come up with a strategy that would have created enough good jobs for people adequately and meaningfully to maintain themselves.

It is at this point that no one—neither the reactionary detractors nor the defenders of the social programs under attack—can manage an answer. For the painful reality of the 1980s is that the economy still does not generate enough jobs, and because of racial discrimination blacks have limited access even to those.

Where, then, do we go from here? We must begin simply by being honest. The problem being evaded—the present structural inadequacy of the economy—should be acknowledged. As a corollary, the notion " 'We' did something for 'them' and look at the result!" must be exposed for what it is. Until this country finds a way to generate enough jobs for people who want to work—and there are massive numbers of them—it simply won't do to go around blaming the poor as "immoral" or "lazy." Once this much is accepted, it will be possible to talk seriously about what people can do for themselves and, more important, what the society can do for them.

Talk of job training and welfare reform, for instance, is futile in the absence of jobs, whether in the public or private sector or, ideally, in both. In areas of high unemployment, it makes no sense to declare that "they" will get jobs if "they" are educated. If that is true, why are there so many educated people now in poverty-level or part-time jobs and on the unemployment lines? One area calls for immediate action. For ghettoized teen-agers, male and female, the economic and social crisis is so grave that programs should be devised to provide work through public and private means *while they are in school.*

Of course, all programs enacted will entail community action of the self-help variety. Black people have always, often under great duress, helped themselves. But no black private institutions, agencies or individuals can fulfill the macroeconomic role of generating widespread employment; it is simplistic, if not the cruelest deception, to speak of their being able to do so. The private sector can assist, but it is the Federal government that must take the lead in turning the faces of citizens once more toward the ideals and goals of a society both fair and just.

As Ray Marshall, Secretary of Labor under President Carter, put it:

> We know that a full-employment policy would be good business. With a jobs program, $15 billion could save the Federal government $30 billion. We've demonstrated that in the past. The main reason we don't do it now is the neoconservative mythology that it didn't work. We ought not to let them get by with that. The contrary evidence is overpowering.
>
> . . .
>
> We should not let people make abstractions of human suffering. . . . Rather what we should fear most, as citizens of the richest nation on earth, is the judgment of the world community and of history that we were unwilling to be good and faithful stewards of our resources, that we deliberately decided not to use our resources to try to improve the human condition.

Any other course will betray the committed Americans who participated in, and paid dearly for, the most ennobling struggle of our times. And this, ultimately, was the message that the relatives of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner took to the White House on June 23. □

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SEXUAL POLITICS OF WELFARE

The Racialization Of Poverty

MARGARET B. WILKERSON AND
JEWELL HANDY GRESHAM

American policymakers have an uncanny ability to obfuscate and compartmentalize social problems—to recognize on the one hand that the United States has an unacceptably high level of unemployment, particularly among specific groups, and to recognize that we also have an incredibly high number of female-headed families, particularly within the same groups, but to avoid the cause-and-effect relationship between the two phenomena. —*Ruth Sidel*
Women and Children Last

The term "feminization of poverty," which was devised to describe the significant numbers of women and children living in poverty, is a distortion that negates the role played by racial barriers to black employment, particularly among males. The feminization of poverty is real, but the *racialization* of poverty is at its heart. To discuss one without the other is to play a mirror game with reality.

In *Women and Children Last: The Plight of Poor Women in Affluent America*, sociologist Ruth Sidel observes that in contemporary America, "welfare" has become a euphemism for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (A.F.D.C.). More, the term is now used to mask, barely, negative images of teeming black female fecundity—particularly among teen-agers—and of feckless black males who abandon their children. The fact that it is specifically black unwed mothers who evoke this atavistic response shows that race, not gender, is the source of revulsion.

Currently, the most critical problem relating to the plight of black unwed mothers is the massive unemployment of the males who would otherwise be potential mates for them. Sidel ties her discussion of black male unemployment to a survey of black versus white incomes. In 1981, for example, 47 percent of black college graduates earned $20,000 to $40,000 a year, the income spread for the majority of white *high school* graduates. This is only one of many facts evidencing the degree of discrimination against blacks in the workplace.

Although the number of black men holding professional, technical, managerial and sales jobs has increased significantly, the number who are unemployed is "astronomical," Sidel observed. "It is estimated that approximately 45 percent of black men do not have jobs, including not only those officially classified by the Census Bureau but also those who are counted as 'discouraged and no longer looking for work.' " In addition, she wrote,

> according to a statistician with the Children's Defense Fund, approximately 15-29 percent of black men aged twenty to forty *could not be found by the Bureau in 1980.* They are presumed to have neither permanent residences nor jobs. If they are added to the number of unemployed, the number of black men without jobs can be estimated to be well over 50 percent. (Emphasis added.)

This level of unemployment is more than double the figure for all workers at the height of the Great Depression. William Julius Wilson, author of *The Truly Disadvantaged,* states that in one of the Chicago ghetto neighborhoods he studied, the ratio of employed black males to their impoverished female counterparts was 18 to 100.

Such a "shockingly high rate of male unemployment," Sidel points out, "has had a direct bearing on the dramatic rise in black female-headed families." Yet we still look for "the 'causes' of the rise in black-female families, debate whether the welfare system encourages their proliferation, blame the mothers for having babies outside of marriage—but largely ignore the impact of male unemployment on family life."

One of the most pernicious aspects of the white patriarchal definition of an acceptable household (one headed by a male who is able to provide for his family) is that the masses of black youth and men who are excluded from the opportunities and rewards of the economic system cannot possibly meet this requirement. Then both males and females of the subjugated class are castigated as being morally unfit because they have not held their reproductive functions in abeyance.

At the same time, there is the insidious notion that households headed by black women are *destined* for poverty, not because of the absence of economic means but because of the absence of the male. (Unwed mothers who happen to be affluent are sometimes dubbed "bachelor mothers" to distinguish them from this group.) Feminists who omit race and racism as a possible decisive variable in any analysis of American poverty—and most particularly the poverty of black women—unwittingly contribute to this notion. When sociologist Diana Pearce coined the term "feminization of poverty" in 1978, she had in mind "two characteristics of women's poverty that distinguish it from the poverty experienced by men: children and labor market discrimination."

But in view of the astronomical levels of black males who are excluded from the labor market, the plight of black children must be examined in light of the circumstances of both their mothers and fathers, even though the mothers are usually left with the responsibility of caring for the children after the fathers depart under economic duress.

'All They'll Do Is Have More Children'

In her recent book *Regulating the Lives of Women: Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present,* Mimi Abramovitz provides a comprehensive account of the welfare policies of this society from their beginnings in 1935, when the Social Security Act legitimized the idea of social insurance. The immediate predecessor of the act was a pension to widows with young children, limited almost entirely to white women. In the 1930s, Aid to Dependent Children (A.D.C.) was born in the provisions for a "means-tested"

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public assistance program for the impoverished elderly, blind adults and poor children with absent fathers.

With the passage of this program, Abramovitz notes, the state took direct responsibility for reproduction in female-headed household under certain conditions, foremost among them that the mothers stay at home to rear their children. While that patriarchal model was set up for some women, however, an opening was left to insure that an ample supply of low-paid female domestic and casual labor reached the market through provisions denying aid to "undeserving" women.

By race, black women fell collectively into the category of "the undeserving." By class, so did large numbers of white women. Some states drew up, Abramovitz noted, "employable mother" rules that disqualified able-bodied women with school-age children, especially black women, on the ground that they should work. In the late 1930s, one Southern public assistance field supervisor reported the following:

> The number of Negro cases is few due to the unanimous feeling on the part of the staff and board that there are more work opportunities for Negro women and to their intense desire not to interfere with local labor conditions. The attitude that they have always gotten along, and that "all they'll do is have more children" is definite. . . . There is hesitancy on the part of lay boards to advance too rapidly over the thinking of their own communities, which see no reason why the employable Negro mother should not continue her usual sketchy seasonal labor or indefinite domestic service rather than receive a public assistance grant.

This commonplace form of discrimination is only one example of the vicissitudes of the marketplace to which black women and children, like black men, have historically been subjected.

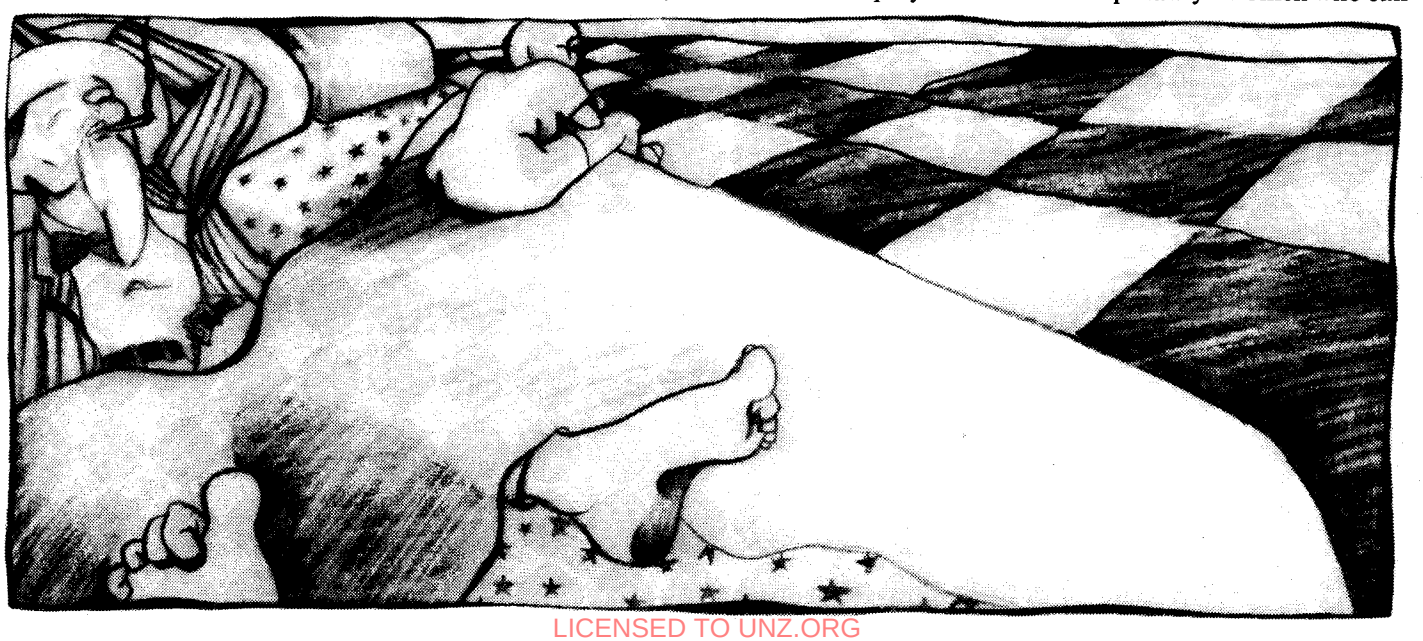
The A.D.C. program, which grew from 372,000 families in 1940 to 803,000 in 1960, declined temporarily during World War II and the Korean War. In 1962, it became Aid to Families with Dependent Children. In the face of its rapid expansion and a shift in the composition of the caseload from white widows to unwed mothers and women of color, A.D.C. was attacked for faltering in the task of regulating the lives of poor women by excluding the undeserving. With the entry of significant numbers of black women into the program, the attacks upon it became widespread and systematically racist.

The black women who are caught in oppressive circumstances can articulate better than anyone else the flavor of their predicament. Abramovitz quotes Johnnie Tillmon, welfare mother and a leader of the National Welfare Rights Organization in the 1960s and 1970s, who calls the relationship between A.F.D.C. mothers and the system a "super-sexist marriage." Tillmon explains:

> You trade in "a" man for "The" man. But you can't divorce him if he treats you bad. He can divorce you of course, cut you off anytime he wants. But in that case "he" keeps the kids, not you. "The" man runs everything. In ordinary marriage, sex is supposed to be for your husband. On AFDC you're not supposed to have any sex at all. You give up control over your body. It's a condition of aid. . . . "The" man, the welfare system, controls your money. He tells you what to buy and what not to buy, where to buy it, and how much things cost. If things—rent, for instance—really cost more than he says they do, it's too bad for you.

Clearly, the impact of race, class and gender cannot be adequately examined by focusing on the status of women alone; it must also be viewed in the context of prescribed black and white women's roles in the labor marketplace vis-à-vis those of privileged males. It is interesting, for instance, to reflect on the significance of the polar extremes to which women, by race and class, are currently assigned. Felice Schwartz's article on "Management Women and the New Facts of Life," which caused such a furor when it appeared in the January-February issue of the *Harvard Business Review*, has little relevance to black women, whose presence in corporate management positions is negligible.

Schwartz recommended that a double-track system be set up to permit part-time work by women who wanted to spend time with their children (the so-called Mommy track) and full-time employment for "career primary" women who can



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be "worked like men." The corporate world's enthusiastic response to this proposal raises a question: Did it do so because the proposal offered desirable adjustments relating to the reproductive roles of women, or because it would lessen the economic competition coming from women of the corporate class and provide highly skilled female labor at a lower cost? Whatever the case, the issues affect only upper-class women, who can choose whether they work full- or part-time.

The Moynihan-Armstrong 'Reform'

It is instructive to contrast Schwartz's plan with the welfare reform legislation enacted last fall for which New York Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Republican Senator William Armstrong of Colorado took major public credit. Under this program, A.F.D.C. mothers, in keeping with Tillmon's description, will *not* be the ones making the decision as to whether they should remain at home with their children. Those who have children older than 3 *must* go forth as cheaply paid laborers unless they are under 19, in which case they are required to seek educational advancement, assuming the states chip in to fund such programs.

When one considers that a single Chicago housing project may hold as many as 20,000 largely jobless people packed into high-rise buildings of thirty or more stories, just how this program's proponents intend to insure adequate child care services for the poor mothers forced to leave their children is not clear, especially when day care facilities and personnel are unavailable even to large numbers of middle-class and upper-class mothers. And what means of transportation will these poor (and frequently inexperienced) mothers use when they pack themselves and their children off to baby-sitters? One wonders how many of the men who sit in the halls of Congress have ever played a parenting role in which they had the opportunity to engage in such tasks for even, let us say, one week.

For tens of thousands of the urban poor in housing projects, the length of time it takes for the elevators in their buildings merely to rise to their floors and descend again—assuming they work at all—can present a crisis. How far a mother and her child or children must travel after that—and by what means—before the youngsters can be deposited and mothers continue on their way may represent another; what arrangements can be made with the employer when the children are ill, yet another. What surcease will be available for the women themselves if they are ill, or harried, or weary beyond bearing? How can they summon up sufficient energy to help their school-age children with homework, assuming they have sufficient education to do so? And so on, endlessly.

Ponder just a fraction of the problems in populations in which babies, children, youth and adults die off at unconscionably high ratios from preventable or manageable diseases and conditions (and whose mothers, and fathers when they are present, must be particularly vigilant to guard their children against becoming casualties of the pervasive scourge of drugs, in psychologically and physically violent neighborhoods) and it becomes apparent why some "experts" and officials take refuge in abstract solutions, or none at all.

When one further reflects on where any jobs will come from, and—in the case of teen-age mothers ordered to finish high school—what miraculous educational services are contemplated, the picture for those deprived by race *and* class appears not brighter but potentially even more retrogressive.

In a chapter of her book entitled "Welfare," Sidel provides a picture of the intolerable treatment systematically accorded the nation's poor when applying for or receiving A.F.D.C. aid. In spite of the attempts of many caseworkers to preserve a sense of personal compassion, the weight of the system overwhelms them.

More than any other single factor, women on welfare report that the most damaging traumas they suffer are the humiliations daily meted out in welfare offices all over the country, which are designed to demean and punish them for being in need. Besides a barrage of examples drawn from A.F.D.C. mothers, Sidel quotes from an analysis of the working class, *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, by Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb.

"Dignity is as compelling a human need as food or sex," these men wrote, "and yet here is a society which casts the mass of its people into limbo, never satisfying their hunger for dignity." In describing the "plight of blue-collar workers who feel shamed and demeaned by their position in American society," the authors point out that these workers survive by keeping

> a certain distance from the problems of class and class consciousness, by separating themselves from their feelings when they are interacting with the world the same way as the poor attempt to protect themselves from the not-so-hidden injuries of poverty. They try to deal with the welfare bureaucracies with resignation and deadened emotions. They leave "the real me" somewhere else when they must cope with the intrusive questions, the unspoken (and all-too-often spoken) criticisms, the disregard for their humanness.

White blue-collar workers humiliated in such fashion may be able, in general, to hide behind a blanket of public anonymity, but black welfare recipients are seldom permitted even this refuge. Sidel quotes a black social worker in Atlanta, who describes the county offices that administer A.F.D.C. as "little nations" and the client population as "very fearful":

> They will use all of their resources rather than go to welfare. They're not going to take that ugliness, that humiliation. . . . Georgia will not give welfare to a two-parent family. These people are treated so badly that they would rather sell dope and steal instead.

The director of Family and Children Services in De Kalb County, Georgia, reports a dramatic increase over the past years in requests for emergency aid arising out of the state's "trimming the rolls." County workers may give emergency aid only once to a family. "When asked what a family did if it had received emergency aid once and was in dire need again, one worker replied dryly, 'Pray a lot.' "

Sidel recounts numerous tales of fortitude among welfare

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recipients, such as that of the mother of two children who took two buses to get her children to her grandmother's every day so that she could attend a community college. When she completed her work and, with the help of scholarships, went on to a four-year school, she could not tell her caseworker—because A.F.D.C. did not support students in four-year programs, only two-year or vocational schools. In such blatant fashion is revealed A.F.D.C.'s policy of keeping the poor poor.

The role of racism in the system is the traditional one of making racial and class exploitation easier. Dangerous precedents that will be harmful to the welfare of major segments of the society can be established by first applying them only to blacks. One can gain some idea of how this works by examining the way the national political leadership treats the masses. An example is the targeting of black adolescents by top "centrist" echelons of the Democratic Party. On the one hand, teen-age mothers are projected as carriers of a particular strain of pathology against which drastic measures must be taken. (Only recently, Moynihan ascribed malignancy to the black "matriarchy"!) Concomitantly, black male teen-agers are propelled to the forefront of black criminality, which must be destroyed. This may be the first time in history that a nation has singled out a specific race of youths against whom to direct its frustration and fury.

Sam Nunn's 'National Service' Solution

Writing in *The New York Times* on May 30, 1987, Frances Fox Piven and Barbara Ehrenreich argued that the welfare reform act will accomplish little more than creating a new form of "mass peonage." Some idea of what is in store for youthful black males and females bound into a single package for manipulation may be glimpsed in the legislation currently sponsored in the Senate by Sam Nunn. The ill-conceived proposal would eliminate all forms of Federal educational grants for higher education to poor students and replace them with a "Citizenship and National Service Act," which is, in effect a "workfare" program. For two years of labor, young

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people would receive a stipend of $10,000 annually at the conclusion of their "service." If they volunteered for the military, their reward would be $12,000 per year. Virtually the only way that most of the poor could get into college would be through this "national service."

In combination, the two programs—welfare and national service—would create bureaucratic machinery for manipulating black young people. It would channel a pool of cheap black female labor, composed of welfare mothers, into the work force and harness the energies of their male counterparts through the national service plan. Disproportionate numbers of young black males would be drawn to the military by the added stipend, and thereby rendered disproportionately vulnerable to wartime death. (America has always found it easier to propel its black youths toward death than to educate them.)

One might also ask whether the stipends will help many deprived young people to enter college. Not very much in the way of higher education can be purchased for $10,000 or $12,000, and the temptation would be great for black and white families of limited means to spend the money on a dozen needs having higher priority.

In the case of A.F.D.C. mothers, former Secretary of Labor Ray Marshall points out that 86 percent of all social welfare spending since the 1960s has gone to America's elderly, and only a small proportion to A.F.D.C. mothers or their offspring. The result has been that poverty among the elderly has declined almost by half, from more than 25 percent at the beginning of the War on Poverty to 14 percent in 1983. Just the opposite is true with regard to America's children, primarily blacks and others of color whose parents are poor. In a 1986 article in *Southern Changes* titled "The War Against the Poor," Robert Greenstein, director of the Washington-based Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, wrote:

> If you look at the statistics of American poverty today, one set—the figures for children's poverty—hits you over the head. Fifteen years ago the child poverty rate was between thirteen and fourteen percent. Last year it was over twenty-one percent. . . . And, while there has been a very slight recent reduction in the overall poverty rate during the past year, and in the overall child poverty rate, all the reduction in child poverty has occurred among white children. None of it has occurred among black or Hispanic children.
>
> The poverty rate for black children under the age of six now has reached just over fifty-one percent.

If one out of every two black children in this country is born poor, and the national leadership regards black adolescents as exemplars of pathology instead of promise, what must black Americans do? What must society do?

For one thing, we might begin by reviewing the attitudes of officials of the national government—of the Bush Administration and members of Congress of both political parties—toward the well-being of *all* members of the society. In particular, we should make certain that the political conditions are created and sustained that will encourage those who serve in positions of leadership to do so not by ignoring race, gender and class as determining variables affecting the lives of the people, but by developing infinitely more sophisticated means to address and redress what is wrong. And we, who are most directly affected by race, class and gender, should advance our own knowledge accordingly.

Even, for example, if we were concerned simply with the reproductive roles, functions and rights of women, it would still be necessary to develop a keener awareness of the interrelated roles of race, gender and class oppression—including the institutionalized white-male-over-black-male oppression, which in this patriarchal (not matriarchal) society underpins everything else.

Black women must address the enormous problems within the black community, including black male sexism and rage, particularly the violence and, yes, the pathology of anger and frustration that is taken out against them and other members of the community. But we cannot turn our attention to any condition besetting black people without consideration of the terrible toll of the white racism and sexism which undergird and perpetuate an oppressive system.

Barbara Ommolade, a single-mother college counselor, activist and writer who has been on welfare, neatly and eloquently summed up the picture in "It's a Family Affair: The Real Lives of Black Single Mothers" (*Village Voice*, July 15, 1986):

> Today, the context of the struggle to have a black family is legal desegregation and superficial political gains for black people, along with high unemployment among black men, depressed wages for black women, and public denigration of poor people. The concept of a pathological underclass has become the rationale for continued racism and economic injustice; in attempting to separate racial from economic inequality and [in] blaming family pathology for black people's condition, current ideology obscures the system's inability to provide jobs, decent wages, and adequate public services for the black poor. And in a racist-patriarchal society, the effects of the system's weaknesses fall most heavily on black women and children. Just as black family life has always been a barometer of racial and economic injustice and at the same time a means of transcending and surviving those injustices, black families headed by women reflect the strength and the difficulty of black life in the 80's.

Black women know the critical problems of our communities, but we also know their strengths. We have to call on those strengths collectively from blacks now, but we also call

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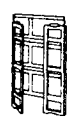
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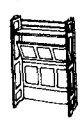
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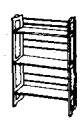
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on more. It is the obligation of all concerned Americans to join forces in seeking to remove the stigma from government assistance to citizens in need. And to make certain that channels exist for people who are temporarily down to recover their footing, thankful that a nurturing society exists for them and conscious of their responsibility to be nurturing too. □

CHILDREN OF VALUE

We *Can* Educate All Our Children

CONSTANCE CLAYTON

The black family and the urban public schools share more than their children. The "plight" of each has been assayed in apocalyptic terms and chronicled in the reports of myriad researchers, panels, commissions and task forces. A new generation of academics has cut its teeth on elaborate analyses written for publication, tenure and self-promotion.

After the critics have retreated into their academic and bureaucratic havens, black families and the metropolitan public schools are left to confront the same situation as before—and more often than not, each other. However, all is not quite the same. In ways sometimes subtle and sometimes not, the researchers have suggested that the plight of the black family and that of the urban public schools are not only related but are causally so. Thus, a seeming conundrum: Is the black family to blame for the plight of the public schools? Or have public schools caused the plight of the black family? Neither happens to be the case, but merely posing the issue in that manner is a phenomenon worth exploring.

The paramount public policy issue today is whether this country accepts as inevitable the existence of a permanent underclass. Encoded in much of the rhetoric of concern about the "plight" of the nation's public schools, and about the family life and home environment of the children who attend these schools, is a considerable degree of ambivalence over a more fundamental question: whether this society seriously intends or even desires to educate the mostly black and Latino children who now occupy the majority of seats in its large urban school systems.

There are those who still question in their hearts the proposition that "all children can learn" and who adhere to the belief that the cultural deficits of some children are too deeply embedded to be overcome. However, that ambivalence also may reflect an intuitive recognition that the absence of a commitment to educate the underclass allows for results that mask significant questions that would otherwise arise about the political economy. As Michelle Fine of the University of Pennsylvania noted, the much-discussed subject of "dropouts" presents an excellent example of this masking:

> What would happen, in our present-day economy, to these young men and women if they all graduated? Would their employment and/or poverty prospects improve individually as well as collectively? Would the class, race, and gender differentials be eliminated or even reduced? Or does the absence of a high school diploma only obscure what would otherwise be the obvious conditions of structural unemployment, underemployment, and marginal employment disproportionately endured by minorities, women, and low-income individuals?

Whatever its bases, the ambivalence about the worthiness of the clientele of the urban schools has structured both the diagnosis and the prescription. First, only failure is perceived as significant. It is highly unlikely that much will be said about the tens of thousands of high-school students who graduated this past June and who will go on to succeed in higher education, the armed forces and the public and private sectors. Their achievements (along with those of the parents and teachers who supported them) will go unheralded, unable to fit into the language of failure.

Second, although couched in terms of parental choice, many of the proposed responses to the "problem" sound very much like a prescription for the abandonment of urban public schools. Whether intended or not, proposals for tuition tax credits, vouchers and metropolitan busing plans would facilitate middle-class flight from the urban "inner-city" public classrooms for seemingly greener pastures in suburban, private and parochial schools.

Proposing abandonment of the public schools would be unthinkable if the children served by those schools were white and middle class, or if the public schools involved were on neatly manicured campuses in well-to-do suburbs. Regardless of their relative performance on conventional measures of achievement, persistence and success, deserting these schools would be deemed an unacceptable response. Rather than being seen as populated by "children at risk," they would continue to be seen as serving and caring for children *of value*.

Perhaps the question answers itself, but it still deserves to be asked: Are there not children of value in the urban public schools? If so, why would we countenance abandonment?

The children-of-value formulation differs from the notion of children at risk. The at-risk designation no doubt began as a well-intentioned attempt to focus attention and resources on those children most in need. This original purpose loses much of its efficacy as the number of those "at risk" approximates, surpasses and then exceeds by far the children judged not to be. In those instances, "at risk" becomes as much a misnomer as the term "minority" in a school that is *majority* black and Latino. The continuing vitality of both appellations can be explained either by linguistic inertia or by a political judgment that the term implies a status so fundamental and lasting as to be impervious to change.

Constance Clayton is Superintendent of Schools in Philadelphia.

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It is important to note, however, that the children-at-risk rhetoric is more than a mere misnomer. The children-at-risk rubric locates the problem at the level of the individual child, with the implicit suggestion that this is where the solution must begin. This notion is often accompanied by dreary statistics on the number of children who live in poor, single-parent (generally female-headed) households characterized by high unemployment, low educational attainment and other indicators of marginal or lower socioeconomic status. This litany produces a not-too-subtle and virtually irresistible temptation for schools to join the *if only* chain, a rationale used to explain and excuse less than satisfactory outcomes.

Much of the impetus for school desegregation came from those who believed, conscientiously, that the academic performance of black children could be improved significantly *if only* black children and white children attended the same schools. We know now that even in the absence of second-generation problems, desegregation is no panacea.

The generally negative rendition of black family life sent out yet another siren call. *If only* the children were different (or had different parents from a different social class, race or neighborhood), schools would succeed!

There is at least one major problem with that position: The empirical evidence shows that it is demonstrably wrong. The "effective schools" literature is replete with examples showing that, on the terms by which success is currently measured, there are schools with students of these families that have succeeded in the past and are succeeding now. As the late Ronald Edmonds (belatedly acknowledged as the founder of the effective-schools movement) asked nearly a decade ago:

> How many effective schools would you have to see to be persuaded of the educability of poor children? If your answer is more than one, then I submit that you have reasons of your own for preferring to believe that basic pupil performance derives from family background instead of school response to family background. . . . Whether or not we will ever effectively teach the children of the poor is probably far more a matter of politics than of social science and that is as it should be.

That analysis still holds true. Educating the children in urban schools is no mission impossible. Nor is it a mystery. Given the tools, skills and resources, teachers can insure that students become actively involved and, thereby, more effectively involved in learning. Margaret Wang, director of the Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education, and others have demonstrated that "adaptive instruction," drawing on new insights from cognitive science and research on teaching, can work when given the chance.

Individual schools can be made to work in terms that are important and measurable. Effective schools share common traits that are identifiable and replicable: a school climate conducive to learning, high expectations, emphasis on basic skills and time-on-task, clear instructional objectives and strong instructional leadership. The mini-industry that has grown up around the effective schools' applied research can

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now deliver virtually a turnkey operation. Moreover, James Comer and his colleagues at the Yale Child Study Center have demonstrated by example how explicit recognition of the child-development role of the school, coupled with what is known about social and behavioral science and education, can be employed to overcome poor motivation, low self-esteem, discipline problems and even perceived learning disabilities.

School districts, too, can perform better when the will exists. Across the country, new leadership is recapturing urban school districts from disrepair, decay and red ink, rebuilding both infrastructure and instructional programs. Formerly controversial decisions establishing critical minimums for the curriculum, devising new measures and instruments for assessment and evaluation, and ending social promotions have contributed demonstratively to building the framework for educational improvement.

Because we know that classrooms, schools and school districts can work, and we know how to make them work, it is not unreasonable to conclude, as Edmonds did, that the continued "plight" of the urban public schools must reflect an unwillingness to make the fundamental political decision about whether a permanent underclass is acceptable and necessary.

Those whose interests are served by masking the unwillingness of the society to pursue the redistributive policies necessary to deal with the underclass phenomenon often find aid and comfort among educators who have become frustrated by disappointing results from even the most carefully crafted and expertly implemented school improvement programs. Presented with the choice of either accepting responsibility for repeated failure or blaming the parents and children they serve, these educators choose the latter.

Many of us now recognize that behavior as the false choice that it is and refuse to become or to blame the victim. In short, by unmasking and acknowledging the question of perpetuating an underclass, we go about the business of school improvement and education reform fully cognizant of the Sisyphean nature of our task. Simply put, we commit ourselves to educate children who are real, if not ideal; the children we have, rather than the ones we do not.

The school improvement and education reform agenda is both long and concrete. It includes:

§ early childhood programs to provide interventions at the point at which they will do the most good and have the most lasting value;

§ continuity of instruction efforts to increase time-on-task, increase both student and teacher attendance, reduce "pullout" programs and other school-day interruptions;

§ attention to the middle years and the special needs, concerns and developmental processes of those young adolescents who are often overlooked when educators focus upon the elementary and high schools;

§ regulatory reform initiatives designed to create an environment freed of the vague drafting, inconsistent interpretation, overlapping jurisdiction and inflexible adult procedures that often combine to prohibit preventive intervention, require premature termination of services and encourage programs designed to be audit-proof even if not pedagogically sound.

Even that partial agenda is ambitious. Its completion would be an accomplishment of considerable magnitude. Nonetheless, such an accomplishment would have a pyrrhic quality unless educators are willing to engage the broad spectrum of issues involving the underclass. Educators could commit themselves to the politically risky course of open advocacy for children, particularly those children whose horizons are being constrained by their conscription into the underclass.

If it is to be authentic, that advocacy would have to be seen as consistent with and falling within the institutional mission of the public school. Thus, an explicit component of that undertaking would have to be to promote social improvement. Once part of the mission, advocacy for social change would be included in both the hidden and the official curriculum. Those who are willing to eschew the teaching of core values or to pretend that no values are being taught now are likely to find this a development of calamitous portents. Teaching would have become truly a subversive activity.

Authentic advocacy would mean breaking with established orthodoxy even when that would entail some version of secular heresy. For example, the current debate around bilingual education assumes a consensus about the rightful place of English as the exclusive national language. Schools could enter the national language debate on the side of those who

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Racism clearly underlies much of the problem. . . . In education, racism is expressed in a variety of ways: inadequate resources to those most in need; perpetuating segregated schools; and in some schools, the tracking of minority students into less rigorous academic programs without regard for individual abilities, interests and potential.

—"The Time for Assertive Action," Report of the [New York State] Commissioner's Task Force on the Education of Children and Youth At-Risk, October 1988

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oppose the explicit or de facto imposition of a national language.

Educators are in a unique position to challenge that consensus by arguing that to treat the language spoken in a child's home as "un-American" or otherwise illegitimate is cultural chauvinism and has nothing to do with education. They must encourage a re-examination of how schools respond to children from non-English-speaking homes. By so doing they will take an important step toward affirming the worth and dignity of the children they must reach to teach.

Most important, advocacy for children will require that educators cease their tacit collaboration with those who suggest that the causes for educational shortcomings reside with individual children or with their parents. Educators can do this by reiterating loudly and clearly the simple yet profound admission offered by Ronald Edmonds:

> We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need, in order to do this. Whether we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't [done so] so far.

Whether the children of the underclass, who are becoming the predominant clientele of urban public schools, are allowed to be educationally successful is a matter for society to decide. The future of urban public schools depends less on the development of a new pedagogy than on the emergence of a new politics. Without this, the chances in life of those children will be determined less by their mastery of the three Rs than by their ability to prevail over the myriad obstacles created by a fourth—race; less by former Education Secretary William Bennett's trinity of Cs (content, character and choice) than by the pervasive and confining realities of class.

These realities compel a new relationship between black families and public schools. That relationship would be one dedicated to responding to the urgent problems of race and class and the common ground on which they meet: poverty. □

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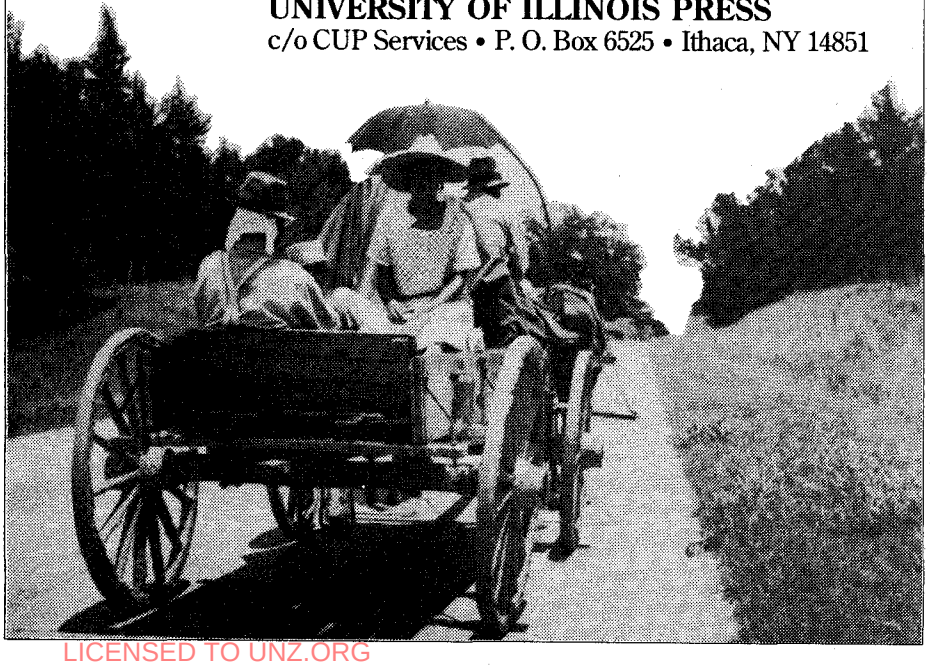

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It is our task to make plain to ourselves the great story of our rise in America from "less than dust" to the heights of sound achievement. . . . The situation we face must be defined, reflected and evaluated.

—Mary McLeod Bethune, 1937

Recent negative portrayals of the black family have made it painfully clear to most African-Americans that although much has changed in the national life, much remains the same. The incessant emphasis on the dysfunctioning of black people is simply one more attempt to show that African-Americans do not really fit into the society—that we are "overdependent" and predominantly welfare-oriented. Quite overlooked in this equation is the fact that most black Americans are, on the contrary, overwhelmingly among the *working* poor.

Equally overlooked when the disingenuous topic of the supposed lack of black "self-help" is conjured up, is a fundamental truth: that the major energies of black people in America historically have had to be directed to attaining the most elementary human freedoms (such as owning one's own body and the fruits thereof) that our white sisters and brothers take for granted. The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s was perhaps the most extraordinary example of a mass "self-help" movement in American history: self-help mounted under grave conditions to throw off the yoke of American apartheid. Yet it was not a new event so much as the continuation of an old tradition. Since the end of the slave era black people have had to provide services for one another in every conceivable way: feeding and clothing the destitute; tending the sick; caring for orphaned children and the aged; establishing insurance companies, burial societies, travelers' accommodations when hotels were segregated—the list goes on.

In 1909, almost fifty years before the modern civil rights movement emerged, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (preceded by the Du Bois–organized Niagara Movement) was founded following the lynching of a black man in Springfield, Illinois. Its first major undertaking was the fight against the hundreds of such atrocities then occurring annually. The Urban League was founded the next year to advance economic self-help.

Eighteen years earlier, a fearless journalist named Ida B. Wells began a crusade against lynching, by lecturing, organizing and compiling the first documentation of the social, political and economic facts behind the atrocities. In 1895, the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs was formed to bring to bear the collective strength of women in ameliorating the desperate conditions in which our people lived.

What is clear to us in the current era of ever mounting disparagement of the black family—and the internalizing by our young people of the negativism thrust upon them daily—is that we need a movement that will retrieve and build upon the value system of the traditional extended family, the strong sense of kinship ties that goes back to the days of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, when it was up to us either to forge ties of mutual support or perish as a people. Those unbreakable bonds sent people searching for one another after the forced separations of slavery. They are still evident in our custom of calling one another brother and sister—and mother, aunt and uncle—even when there is no blood relationship. There's an entire history behind these interactions that is precious to our sense of self-worth and identity as a people. Those who attempt to supplant our conception of ourselves with their own are either ignorant of this proud history or, worse, bent on concealing or eradicating it.

The history of self-help among blacks offers models that will be useful in the search for innovative approaches to current problems. For instance, I recall that in 1939, when I worked in the Harlem Y.W.C.A., the Florence Crittendon Homes took in unmarried white mothers, but there was not a bed in the city for unwed black mothers. The only help available to them was in the limited facilities the Y.W.C.A. could provide. To supplement these we found some black women who belonged to an organization called Club Caroline and who were able to acquire a small house to shelter unwed mothers. Their example was followed by black women's clubs all over the country, whose members formed a national network of assistance, keeping registers of people who were willing to take in a young mother. Economic realities today make it impossible for black people to set up enough small homes to accommodate the large numbers of single mothers, drug addicts, the jobless and homeless, and the thousands of unclaimed black infants languishing in hospitals and foster homes.

Nevertheless, we can learn something from the methods used by the traditional black extended family in which adults possessed the authority to look out for the young, whether or not they were blood relatives. We may not be able to restore entirely the old concept of the extended family, given the present complex (and chaotic) social, political and economic conditions in the large urban centers. But enough of it survives to draw upon in encouraging more caring communities in which neighbors look around them to see what's happening and set up networks for alerting others to impending threats. It is important for our young people to know that our past holds valuable traditions. Black sociologists have not been alone in pointing out that instead of constantly focusing on the problems of black families, their

Dorothy Height has been president and chief executive officer of the 4-million-member National Council of Negro Women since 1957 and is one of the country's principal civil rights leaders. She served as the director of racial justice at the Y.W.C.A. of the United States for thirty-three years.

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white counterparts should examine its historic strengths: the respect for older people, the communal nurturing of children, the ability to feed an entire family on next to nothing, the unceasing toil of parents (often assisted by the community) to send their children through college, the black entrepreneurs who built up businesses to serve our needs after others refused to. In short, our endless coping skills.

We have always stressed the work ethic. We have never been a lazy people; hard work has killed a great number of us. A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, used to say that what black folk needed was not more work but more pay for the work that they do, and they could manage the rest. It is only recently in the cities, where higher skills are required and the quality of education has deteriorated, that unemployment and the grimmest kind of poverty have become constants and whole generations are growing up in neighborhoods where few people have jobs.

Some social analysts are correct when they say that public policies had a great deal to do with producing this state of affairs, but they refuse to acknowledge the impact of racial discrimination on education and employment. They define a "family" as a social/economic/political unit with a man at its head, and they continue to insist on this definition even at a time when divorce rates and serial marriages, resulting in merged families and increasing numbers of female-headed households, reveal how archaic it is.

For black people, this definition has never applied. Black traditions of the extended family grew out of the primary need to survive, an urgency that for the most part made gender differentials largely irrelevant. So did the grim economic realities that traditionally necessitated that both black men and women work in order to earn a decent living for their families—or, for that matter, to make their way at all. That throughout history many black women have had to accomplish these things without male partners consistently at our sides is much more the result of the racism that limits—and frequently destroys—black males than of "immorality" (as white scholars could discern, if they ever deigned to do research in this area).

Blacks have never said to a child, "Unless you have a mother, father, sister, brother, you don't have a family." I think that the wrongheaded emphasis on the nuclear family has led to the demoralization of young people, both white and black. Because of it, a child who is not part of a nuclear family—or whose family does not behave in the manner of the model—may well say, "I'm nobody."

The N.C.N.W. and the Black 'Family Celebrations'

For fifty-four years the National Council of Negro Women—composed of civic, church, educational, labor, community and professional organizations uniting 4 million members—has carried on the tradition of black self-help. We at the N.C.N.W., following in the footsteps of our founder, the indefatigable educator Mary McLeod Bethune, have focused attention on the concerns of black women and their families. On behalf of young black people, the N.C.N.W. has taken counteractions aimed at restoring or bolstering collective self-esteem in order to lift the morale of the people in coping with the problems they face, whether related to drugs, education, teen-age pregnancy, employability, health problems or whatever they might be.

In recent years we at the N.C.N.W. have built on the special tradition of black "family celebrations" to bring people together. In 1986 we sponsored the first Black Family Reunion Celebration, held on the Washington Mall with almost 200,000 people in attendance. In 1987 three others followed, in Washington, Los Angeles and Detroit. In 1988 a coming-together was celebrated in Philadelphia and again on the Washington Mall in what had become a national movement.

So far, nearly 2 million African-Americans have flocked to the black family celebrations, a turnout that attests to the hunger of our people to hear something other than the constant negativism that is directed our way, to gain strength and inspiration from one another and, in many cases, to secure advice or help from someone we can trust. We have used these occasions to stress black history and the tradition of helping one another, qualified by our awareness that we now live in a society and world that is vastly different from the simpler times in which our sense of community—whatever threatened us—was intact.

In these celebrations, the N.C.N.W. stresses what we consider to be genuine family values. Coretta Scott King shared what it has meant to be a single mother for all the years since her husband's assassination. She spoke not as the wife of a martyred leader but as the mother of children whom she had to bring up alone. We regularly have Masons come to talk about their early history and how they have contributed to the building of their communities. We have celebrities ga-

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lore, but we also have young people rapping about teen-age pregnancy, drugs or whatever is their most urgent concern. And we also provide allied services. In Washington, when the D.C. Drugmobile was brought to the Mall, the lines before it were as long as those before the black film festival. The impact of our offerings has been felt in the public schools, where teachers report that in the week following the reunion celebration, children flock to school eager to make reports on their activities. All because we have a children's pavilion with black history puppets and African and African-American storytelling.

The N.C.N.W. also offers health checks. At the very first celebration, 20,000 people were tested for cholesterol levels and untold numbers for high blood pressure. Many had never had checkups of any kind before. And children waited patiently in line to get their teeth examined at facilities provided by the Howard University College of Dentistry.

Long lines also formed before our education booths. A young woman taxi driver told me recently that until she and her husband attended the Black Family Reunion Celebration she did not know that someone could earn a high-school diploma without going back to the classroom. Subsequently, they decided that they were too young to be included in the numbers of unskilled blacks predicted for the year 2000. Both took extra jobs and were studying for the General Education Development test.

I was sobered by the realization that this young woman might have lived near an adult education center and never dreamed that it was meant for her. The N.C.N.W. is helping people understand that they can be active on their own behalf. At the Family Celebration in Atlanta we disseminated information from the Summer Youth Employment Training Program about jobs that were going begging for lack of applicants. When the young people in attendance discovered that the opportunities were not limited to those with special qualifications, they promptly got on the telephone to call their friends. As a result, there were applicants for almost all the jobs before the celebration ended.

There are many such stories growing out of our reunions. Of course, some may say the victories are small compared with the breadth of the problem. But activities in which a million people participate cannot be taken lightly. We at the N.C.N.W. and other black self-help organizations have no intention of spending our time lamenting the inadequacies of a society that has failed to develop the means to make every member aware that he or she belongs. The N.C.N.W. has a wide range of programs to serve African-American women and their families in the United States and an international division to assist women and their families in African countries. Currently, we are working to make a difference in all of the critical areas of human suffering enumerated here. Our first priority, as exemplified by our Black Family Reunion Celebrations, is to make clear that ours is a caring community and to inspire others, particularly our young, to press on in various ways, both to advance themselves and to further the larger struggle of our people.

One lesson is plain as we proceed: that public officials can establish all kinds of public programs thought up by people removed from the problems, and most will not work because the people for whom the programs are intended have been permitted no input in defining the problems as they actually know them to be, or in recommending the solutions. Skilled black professionals (and sensitive others) trusted by the community because they have contributed to its well-being can play a vital role in contributing to the formulation of wiser public policies—if only we can get decision-makers to listen. □

TEEN-AGE PREGNANCY

The Case for National Action

FAYE WATTLETON

In 1983 a 25-year-old woman with a 9-year-old daughter gave the following testimony before Congress:

> In the tenth grade, my girlfriends and I were all sexually active, but none of us used birth control. I had hopes of a career and I wanted to go to college. One day my mother said, "Towanda, you're pregnant." I asked her how she knew. She said, "I can just tell."
>
> My mother wouldn't even consider abortion. I had nothing to say about a decision that would alter my entire life. A few weeks after the baby was born, my mother said, "You'll have to get a job." The only job I could get was in a bar.
>
> I spent two years dealing with the nightmare of welfare. Finally I went to the father of my child and asked him to take care of her while I went back to school. He agreed.
>
> I am now making some progress. I went to business school and I now have a job working in an office in Washington. But my life has been very difficult. . . . I had ambitions as a child, but my hopes and dreams were almost killed by the burden of trying to raise a child while I was still a child myself.

This young woman's story is relived around us every day. The United States has the dubious distinction of leading the industrialized world in its rates of teen-age pregnancy, teen-age childbirth and teen-age abortion. According to a study of thirty-seven developed nations published by the Alan Guttmacher Institute in 1985, the teen pregnancy rate in the United States is more than double the rate in England, nearly triple the rate in Sweden and seven times the rate in the Netherlands. Throughout the 1970s, this rate rose in the United States, while it declined in such places as England, Wales and Sweden. Each year, more than 1 million American teen-agers become pregnant; about half of these young women give birth.

Teen pregnancy is both cause and consequence of a host of social ills. The teen-agers likeliest to become pregnant are those who can least afford an unwanted child: those who are

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poor, those who live with one parent, those who have poor grades in school and those whose parents did not finish high school. As the National Research Council points out, teen mothers face "reduced employment opportunities, unstable marriages (if they occur at all), low incomes, and heightened health and developmental risks to the children. . . . Sustained poverty, frustration, and hopelessness are all too often the long-term outcomes." Compounding the tragedy is the fact that children of teen-age mothers are more likely to become teen parents themselves. The burden is felt by the entire society: The national costs of health and social service programs for families started by teen-agers amount to more than $19 billion a year.

Media accounts have tended to represent teen-age pregnancy as primarily a problem of the black community, and implicitly—or explicitly, as in the case of the 1986 CBS Special Report on the "vanishing" black family by Bill Moyers—they have attempted to blame the problem on the so-called degeneracy of the black family. Such distortions of fact are particularly dangerous because they coincide all too neatly with the insensitivity to blacks and the blame-the-victim ideology that the Reagan Administration so disastrously fostered.

High rates of teen pregnancy actually are as all-American as apple pie. Even when the figures for "nonwhite" teens were subtracted from the calculations, the rate of teen pregnancy in the United States in 1981 (83 per 1,000) far exceeded the teen pregnancy rates in all other major industrialized nations. In England and Wales, our closest competitors, the rate for teens of all races was just 45 per 1,000.

The fact of the matter is that teen-age pregnancy rates in the United States have a great deal more to do with class than they do with race. The majority of poor people in this country are white, and so are the majority of pregnant teenagers. In a report published in 1986, the Guttmacher Institute examined interstate differences in teen pregnancy rates. It found that the percentage of teens who are black is relatively unimportant as a determinant of overall state variations in teen-age reproduction. It is states with higher percentages of poor people and of people living in urban areas—whatever their race—that have significantly higher teen pregnancy and birth rates.

Teen pregnancy is as grave a problem within many black communities as are poverty and social alienation. One-third of all blacks, and one-half of all black children, live in poverty. And today the pregnancy rate among teens of color is double that of white teens. One of every four black children is born to a teen-age mother; 90 percent of these children are born to unwed mothers. Such patterns can only intensify the problems already facing the black community. Disproportionately poor, blacks are disproportionately affected by the social and economic consequences of teen-age pregnancy.

We need only look to other Western nations to recognize both the cause and the solutions to our teen pregnancy problem. American teens are no more sexually active than their counterparts in Europe; and teen-agers abroad resort to abortion far less often than do those in the United States. There is a major cause for our higher rates of teen pregnancy

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and childbirth: the fundamental discomfort of Americans with sexuality. Unlike other Western societies, we have not yet accepted human sexuality as a normal part of life. The result is that our children, and many adults as well, are confused, frightened and bombarded by conflicting sexual messages.

Most parents recognize their role as the first and most important sexuality educators their children will have, providing information and sharing family values from the time their children are born. Nevertheless, many parents are unable to talk with their children about such sensitive issues as sex and human relationships. Schools do not fill the gap. Only seventeen states and the District of Columbia mandate comprehensive sex education. As a result, many teen-agers are abysmally ignorant about their reproductive functions.

The mass media, particularly television, only exacerbate the problem. Many teen-agers spend more time in front of the television than they do in the classroom, and their sexual behavior in part reflects what they have learned from this thoroughly unreliable teacher. Nowhere is it more apparent than on television that America suffers from sexual schizophrenia: We exploit sex, and at the same time we try to repress it. Programs and advertisements bombard viewers with explicit sexual acts and innuendo. One study indicates that in a single year, television airs 20,000 sexual messages. Yet rarely is there any reference to contraception or to the consequences of sexual activity.

A substantial number of teens believe that what they see on television is a faithful representation of life. Many believe that television gives a realistic picture of pregnancy and the consequences of sex. And large numbers of teens say they do not use contraceptives because they are "swept away" by passion—surely a reflection of the romanticized view of sex that pervades the mass media.

Network executives, though they apparently have few qualms about exploiting the sexual sell twenty-four hours a day, have the hypocrisy to claim that good taste forbids them to carry ads for contraceptives. Some of the networks recently decided to accept condom ads, though not during prime time, and those ads promote condoms only as protection against AIDS, not against pregnancy. It should not surprise us, then, that America's youths are sexually illiterate, or that 67 percent of sexually active teens either never use contraceptives or use them only occasionally.

We have not failed to resolve this problem for lack of majority agreement on how to do it. A 1988 Harris public opinion survey done for Planned Parenthood found a strong consensus about both the severity of the teen pregnancy problem and about how to solve it:

§ Ninety-five percent of Americans think that teen-age pregnancy is a serious problem in this country, up 11 percent from 1985.
§ Seventy-eight percent of parents believe that relaxed discussions between parents and children about sex will reduce unintended teen-age pregnancy.
§ Eighty-nine percent endorse school sex education.
§ Eighty percent support school referrals of sexually active teens to outside family-planning clinics.
§ Seventy-three percent favor making contraceptives available in school clinics.

School-linked clinics that offer birth control as part of general health care are growing in number in many areas of the country. Community support and involvement are crucial to their development, to insure that the programs are consistent with community values and needs.

Clearly the vast majority of Americans, regardless of racial, religious or political differences, strongly supports the very measures that have proven so effective in reducing teen pregnancy rates in other Western nations. Unfortunately, an extremist minority in this country has an entirely different outlook on sexuality—a minority that has a level of influence out of all proportion to its size. Eager to cultivate the anti-family planning, antiabortion fringe, the Reagan-Bush Administration and its cohorts in Congress sought to whittle down Federal funds for domestic and international family planning, limit sex education in the schools, eliminate confidentiality for birth control and abortion services and block the development of school-linked clinics. These vocal opponents object to everything that has proven successful elsewhere in the industrialized world. Their one and only solution to the problem of teen-age pregnancy is, "Just say no!" But just saying no prevents teen-age pregnancy the way "Have a nice day" cures chronic depression.

There is nothing inherent in American life that condemns us permanently to having the highest teen pregnancy rate in the Western world—nothing that Sweden, England, France, the Netherlands and Canada have been able to do that we cannot.

Parents must talk with their children about all aspects of sexuality—openly, consistently and often—beginning in

ANOTHER PICTURE

At all costs we must resist a national inclination to define the complex problem of teen pregnancy as one peculiar to a black "underclass," and to act as if welfare is the main cause or consequence of this social phenomenon which affects many different target groups in different ways and which will respond to a range of outreach strategies. . . . The families portrayed in the media too often are one slice of the black family crisis that must be addressed by the black community and by the nation. But there are other slices of black and white youth and family reality about whom we do not hear: the many millions of children in poor families who are not on welfare or who are coping despite teen pregnancy and other barriers of poverty; the many poor children who do not get pregnant at all, and the millions of middle-class teens, black and white, male and female, who need the same parental communication and value transfusion that poor children also need.

—Marian Wright Edelman
President, Children's Defense Fund
Ebony, July 1987

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early childhood. Every school district in the country should provide comprehensive sex education, from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Community groups need to support the development of school-linked health clinics. The media must present realistic, balanced information about relationships and the consequences of sex. Television, in particular, must end the restrictions on contraceptives advertising. Government—at the local, state and Federal levels—must live up to its obligation to eliminate any financial barriers to family-planning education and services and to foster a community environment in which our children can flourish and aspire to a productive and fulfilling life.

But we must also recognize that the teen pregnancy problem cannot be solved through sexuality education and family-planning services alone. If our efforts are to succeed, society must provide all our young people with a decent general education, tangible job opportunities, successful role models and real hope for the future.

It is only by placing such a comprehensive national agenda at the top of the priority list that our society can protect the creative and productive potential of its youth. □

GOVERNMENT MUST RESPOND

Drugs, Democrats And Priorities

MAXINE WATERS

I have supported the Democratic Party all my life. To me it was the party to look to for leadership, for action against poverty, for innovative social programs, for progressive thinkers. But now some of its prominent spokespersons are sending a message: Eliminating the poverty and oppression of black people, people of color, or anyone else is no longer on the agenda.

The primary Democratic goal is now to entice "traditional" white male voters back into the fold by convincing them that the party is strong on national defense—and can keep blacks in line. Why should African-Americans join in welcoming back those who practiced the politics of exclusion if they show no signs of having reformed?

If the Democratic Party persists in this course, black people, who vote 85 to 90 percent Democratic and who provided the margin of victory in the 1986 Senate elections, must reassess our commitment. And we must ask ourselves if a third party would not best represent our interests. For if the Democratic Party which owes so much to us does not talk about our issues and address them effectively, where else are we to turn?

The problems now besetting this nation threaten its stability; black people find our very survival at stake. I speak from direct knowledge of the current plight of my own constituency in Los Angeles (which includes Watts), particularly the young, and that of millions of their counterparts concentrated in the crowded "inner-city" ghettos across the country. These people are occupying valuable land and living too disturbingly close for the comfort of the whites surrounding them. A cynical political leadership has capitalized on the misery of these blacks and on the hostilities, guilt and fears of whites.

The most urgent problem facing ghettoized African-Americans today is the lethal infestation of drugs in our communities. The political response from officials of the Federal government—Democrats and Republicans alike—has been to make scapegoats of those on the lowest rungs of the society and to encroach on the fundamental liberties of all people. For almost two decades now, black communities have been fighting almost alone against this invasion by yet another group of entrepreneur/exploiters of our people, who this time batten on the vulnerability of the dispossessed young. But because the majority society pays little attention to anything afflicting black communities until whites are (inevitably) affected, our appeals have gone virtually unheeded by politicians.

Jesse Jackson was the first presidential candidate to put the fight against drugs on his national agenda, in 1984. Not until 1988, when it became plain that large numbers of people were responding to Jackson's message, did other politicians jump on the bandwagon and advocate their own "solutions," largely useless. Foremost among their recommendations were building more prisons and instituting the death penalty for drug-related slayings of law-enforcement officers. That is the typical reaction of white politicians to monumental social problems: Lock people away or kill them. Either way, nothing is done to attack the fundamental causes of the problem.

The media response to these developments has been largely predictable: a pandering to white voyeurism with sensationalized news accounts graphically portraying gang wars over turf; heart-rending stories of innocents caught in the crossfire; and numbing depictions of seemingly aimless and mindless drug-related deaths. And while black communities are besieged with drugs, centrist Democrats have announced a campaign to convince white wanderers to return to the fold. To accomplish this, they say, they will stress two issues: crime and national security. Where were they when the Reagan Administration, on alleged national security grounds, allowed Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega to run his drug operation unimpeded in exchange for his support of the Nicaraguan *contras*? This and numerous other examples have emerged in the Oliver North trial and in the report of Senator John Kerry's Narcotics, Terrorism and International Operations Subcommittee.

Kerry's damning report on the role of the Reagan-Bush Administration in international drug trafficking didn't prevent drug "czar" William Bennett—assisted by Attorney General Richard Thornburgh and Housing and Urban Development director Jack Kemp—from luridly scapegoating black youth and entire families in the housing projects of the nation's capital, as well as the largely black administra-

Maxine Waters is a member of the California Assembly.

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tion of Mayor Marion Barry. The Kerry report makes it quite clear that responsibility for the extensive trafficking that goes on in this country lies far higher than with the street hustler.

In an April 13 appearance on *The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*, Kerry said:

> The flow of drugs from Central and Latin America [is] a different kind of threat from anything that we have yet defined it as. It is, in fact . . . the number one national security threat to the United States. . . . The administration frequently allowed other foreign policy interests, not just the war in Nicaragua, but other interests in the Bahamas or elsewhere, . . . to interfere with the prosecution of the war on drugs, and even to interfere with the normal and natural application of the law by law-enforcement authorities, particularly in Florida.

The Reagan Administration sought to distract attention from the government's role in encouraging the drug problem by focusing on hapless blacks as the cause. Almost as bad was the timidity of the Democrats who let them. And the media who collaborated.

One might ask how drugs became so entrenched in poor black communities. The answer is simple. On the one hand is the economics of exclusion and need; on the other, the psychology of greed. My own district could serve as a model. Long before the last presidential election, those of us who fought for dollars for domestic programs in California were confronted by those who said that "liberalism" is outdated. Legislators and others argued that there wasn't enough money because of the state's budget deficit and the constraints on expenditures as a result of the Gann initiative, which places limits on what California can spend without making distinctions as to which programs are the most important. The same is true in Washington, where the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Act mandates automatic cuts with no opportunity to consider how priorities might be reordered and money better allocated.

As a simple illustration, after programs under the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) were abandoned by the Federal government and private industry was brought in as a partner under the Joint Training Partnership Act (JTPA), many blacks were effectively shut out of jobs training by the elimination of the CETA stipends, which had paid participants while they were in a training program.

Under JTPA, 20-year-old youths without skills are told to go out and search for job training in private industry, even though they may have no money for carfare, lunch, clothes or milk for their baby. Moreover, as now administered, such programs skim off the most employable workers and write off the hard-core jobless. The California Employment Training Panel, which was supposed to teach skills and provide placement, applies only to people who have been out of work for less than a year. Those unemployed longer than that—the vast majority—are out in the cold. So a few years ago in California, we turned back $20 million in Federal grants for job training because the money could not be used for the people who needed it most. Is it any wonder, in short, that I constantly see youths who can scarcely read or write and, given the present programs, have little hope for a remunerative job within their lifetimes? The nation's prisons warehouse countless others, among them many of the brightest and brashest, who refuse to settle for passivity.

An elementary lesson of life is that if people cannot survive in one way they will try another. In an affluent society in which only dollars appear to matter, some young people will find drug-pushing a seductive (or desperate) alternative to low-paying jobs. For the truly entrepreneurial, the drug trade fits neatly into the American concept of "free enterprise." Should that surprise one? Young capitalists develop any way they can—as history tells us they always have.

In black communities, this development is a new phenomenon. In the old days, everyone despised the drug dealer; there was nothing like the great volume of drugs now pouring into the country via a vast international network of suppliers. But the great U.S. slums are now a favorite target because police protection is virtually nonexistent. The prime purpose of most police agencies is to keep the people from encroaching on the sacrosanct turf of the more affluent. Inner cities, in short, provide captive populations. Having said that, I must add that the bulk of the billions of dollars laundered through American and European banks for the coffers of the real profiteers does not come from black people: They don't have that kind of wealth.

In the face of this horror story, we have the rationalizations of police and national officials that the "disintegration of the family" or "lack of values" are responsible for what is the colossal failure of local and Federal officials to wage an effective war against drugs—one in which the strategy of prevention would be clearly defined and underwritten by the necessary resources in money and man- and womanpower and coordinated with respected community activists capable of contributing to the detection and apprehension of those who prey on the community from within and without.

Let Democrats announce that the war on drugs will be one of the priorities of the party for the next four years and that a portion of the billions of dollars being wasted on the military machine will be diverted to this fateful struggle. Democratic members of Congress might also explain why their voices were not heard earlier endorsing the findings of Senator Kerry's subcommittee. And why those Democrats who were on the verge of speaking out during the Iran/*contra* hearings were shushed.

Meanwhile, African-Americans must devise some means of waging political war against those in high places responsible for the present state of affairs. The public at large should take note of the threat to civil liberties when hundreds of police officers conduct sweeping dragnets in black communities ostensibly to get at drug pushers—arbitrarily gathering up innocent people along with the guilty and terrorizing many more. The underlying purpose is not to contribute to the relief of people in those communities (and never has been) but to demonstrate to those outside them the political capacity to contain *all* those within. Such arbitrary sweeps set a dangerous precedent for future use against other groups of people, black and nonblack alike.

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Another development seems even more ominous. Powerful police departments are engaging in battlefield skirmishes primarily against black male youths, who by age and temperament are most likely to respond rashly. It is highly doubtful that the United States, any more than South Africa, will be able to maintain a sense of restraint if war is waged by the technologically powerful agents of the state against children. Yet we may be sliding ever closer toward such a tragedy.

In the face of the crises imposed on beleaguered inner cities, it is absolutely imperative that people within and outside the black communities move into a renewed stage of communal activism to assert leadership in effecting change. Politically, we must insist on genuine options and opportunities for all our youth—including the demand that dollars to help people must include provisions for the hard-core no less than others. In pragmatic terms, we must analyze existing programs—meager though they may be—to assess precisely how they work while forming ourselves into political organizations to structure our own recommendations.

Similarly, if significant numbers of blacks in businesses, churches and professions, along with those who already give to various causes, would say, "I'm going to give at least $10 a month to the community I live in or to which I wish to contribute," a huge difference could be made.

Through it all, the question must be asked: What can we do to help alleviate the terrible psychic trauma daily imposed upon black youth? Black men and women should serve as big brothers and sisters to black girls and boys. Just taking them to the beach, or into one's home, or for a visit to the young people's grandparents or other relatives would help. The aims should be to provide opportunities for the young to get out of the ghetto, and to help them in their personal social development while sensitizing them to the value of collective political action in changing their lives, their communities and their world.

To counter the social isolation of our young people, we also need Saturday church schools on a wide scale in which to teach cultural values and black consciousness. We have the churches, we have the space. Relevant materials exist. What we need is to gather and duplicate whatever is valuable and bring in exciting persons to impart and interpret information and share experiences.

Politically, we must break with those making abstract policies affecting vital institutions currently not serving our interests. Black people should say to Boards of Education, to our liberal friends, to teachers' unions and administrators—to all those who have failed to educate our children: "*This* is what we want in our schools. You do whatever you want in yours."

In the electoral arena, the vote is one of our most powerful and underused tools. With respect to Democratic Party politics, black voters should constantly seek vehicles through which they can make statements and pursue change. Without Jesse Jackson's voice among the presidential candidates in 1984 and 1988, our 30 million voices would have been effectively muzzled. That Jackson speaks for large numbers of others as well is one indication that blacks serve as a barometer for the nation.

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That being so, without Jackson, not only are black interests likely to be passed over but so are those of other segments of voters. The Democrats cannot win the presidency without us and without Jackson and others who will work for the party. If, with Jackson, the party is still the vehicle for us, then we must climb aboard. In doing so, however, we should not cease to be alert to the possibility of other options in the future. Convincing blacks to abandon the long tradition of voting Democratic would require a tremendous educational effort. But clearly, when a party no longer addresses the needs of any group of citizens, it's time to look for a new vehicle. If enough blacks, Latinos and other peoples of color, progressives, labor and other groups decide that the only way to become truly empowered is to organize a third party, even if it takes ten years to develop, then that's the route they should take.

In the interim, to encourage the political development of young people, we need to create training and leadership institutes and our own think tanks. For such training, we need progressive thinkers. Too many politicians, including black ones, think we will be in politics the rest of our lives—that we were born with whatever official title we presently carry and must die with it, which means that we will be willing to do anything to protect it. This means, in turn, that we may accept the ugly mantle of opportunism or adopt accommodating centrist points of view. But to do so would be to cheat our own. If young blacks are coming out of Harvard University wanting to seek heady returns on Wall Street, we should convince them that they are needed for more honorable service.

When I look at what is currently happening to the masses of black people, to America's poor in general and to the entire nation, I am angry and frustrated. But we cannot yield to feelings of helplessness; we must transform anger and frustration into bold and direct action. When others refuse to think of us, it is the more urgent that we think of ourselves first. Those who are worthy of our friendship will stay with us; those who are not, we must discard. As for the Democratic Party, it must prove itself in these critical times or stand, like the Republicans, as just another instrument for betrayal and suppression of the people. □

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JOBS, PEACE, JUSTICE

Challenge for the Year 2000

OSSIE DAVIS

The curse of poverty has no justification in our age. It is socially as cruel and blind as the practice of cannibalism at the dawn of civilization. . . . The time has come for us to civilize ourselves by the total, direct and immediate abolition of poverty.
—Martin Luther King Jr.
Where Do We Go From Here:
Chaos or Community?

Symbols and myths—when emerging uncorrupted from human experience—are precious. Then it is the poetic voice and vision that informs and infuses—the poet-warrior's, the prophet-seer's, the dreamer's—reassuring us that truth is as real as falsehood. And ultimately stronger.

In *Chaos or Community?* (published one year before his death), King's was one such voice, which drew upon another to illustrate the debilitating toll of white oppression on black children. The words upon which King drew came from the pen of W.E.B. Du Bois in manifestation of that great poet-scholar's extraordinary ability to evoke stunning images powerful enough to strike deep into our souls.

"It is difficult," Dr. Du Bois writes in his autobiographical *Dusk of Dawn*, "to let others see the full psychological meaning of caste segregation":

> It is as though one, looking out from a dark cave in a side of an impending mountain, sees the world passing and speaks to it: speaks courteously and persuasively, showing them how the entombed souls are hindered in their natural movement, expression, and development: and how their loosening from prison would be a matter not simply of courtesy, sympathy, and help to them, but aid to all the world.
>
> One talks on evenly and logically in this way but notices that the passing throng does not even turn its head, or if it does, glances curiously and walks on. It gradually penetrates the minds of the prisoners that the people passing do not hear; that some thick sheet of invisible but horribly tangible plate glass is between them and the world. . . . Then the people within may become hysterical. They may scream and hurl themselves against the barriers, hardly realizing in their bewilderment that they are screaming in a vacuum unheard

With his wife, Ruby Dee, Ossie Davis conceived, co-hosted and performed in the critically acclaimed PBS dramatic series, With Ossie and Ruby. *Author of the play* Purlie Victorious, *actor and director on Broadway, film and television, he is the father of three children and was one of eight prominent men designated Father of the Year in 1987. Long active in the civil rights movement, he was master of ceremonies at the March on Washington in 1963 and delivered the eulogy at the funeral of Malcolm X.*

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and that their antics may actually seem funny to those outside looking in. They may even, here and there, break through in blood and disfigurement, and find themselves faced by a horrified, implacable, and quite overwhelming mob of people frightened for their very own existence.

In 1967, King drew on Du Bois's 1940 analogy of the cave as background to his own tale of the months he spent living and working in the ghettos of Chicago to effect open-housing laws. Here he encountered racial hatreds and fury even greater than those he had experienced in the South.

The slum neighborhood in which he took an apartment was an "island of poverty" within a city enjoying one of the highest per capita incomes in the world. From behind the ghetto walls, the black entrapped were well aware of the white suburbanites speeding, via elevated skyways and elaborate expressways, past the vast pockets of black deprivation. Allowed only the hardest, ugliest and most menial jobs, they were just as aware that they were as capable as anyone else of building the tall towers of the modern city—but were excluded by white labor unions.

King wrote in his depressing apartment, looking out on streets where hundreds of children played, lacking playground facilities, and the phone rang daily with "countless stories of man's inhumanity to man." Constantly he found himself, he said, forced to struggle "against the depression and hopelessness which the hearts of our cities pump into the spiritual bloodstream of our lives." Of the children, King wrote:

> When you go out and talk to them you see the light of intelligence glowing in their beautiful dark eyes. Then you realize their overwhelming joy because someone has simply stopped to say hello; for they live in a world where even their parents are often forced to ignore them. In the tight squeeze of economic pressure, their mothers and fathers both must work; indeed, more often that not, the father will hold two jobs, one in the day and another at night. With the long distances ghetto parents must travel to work and the emotional exhaustion that comes from the daily struggle to survive in a hostile world, they are left with too little time or energy to attend to the emotional needs of their growing children.
>
> Too soon you begin to see the effects of this emotional and environmental deprivation. The children's clothes are too skimpy to protect them from the Chicago wind, and a closer look reveals the mucous in the corners of their bright eyes, and you are reminded that vitamin pills and flu shots are luxuries which they can ill afford. The "runny noses" of ghetto children become a graphic symbol of medical neglect in a society which has mastered most of the diseases from which they will too soon die. There is something wrong in a society which allows this to happen.

King wrote *Chaos or Community?* to detail what was wrong; namely, that the most unconscionable horror of America's caves does not lie simply in the squalid housing, the woefully inadequate medical facilities (if any exist at all), the shockingly inferior educational facilities, the psychological violence of the environment promoting violent response among the caged, the lack of access to cultural institutions, or the absence of a "job network system" such

BURLEIGN CARLYLE WEBB, JR.
(Sidi Omar Faruq Tidjani)
1952–1988

•

LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING
by James Weldon Johnson

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the listening skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark
past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the
present has brought us,
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had
died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers
sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears
has been watered,
We have come, treading our path through
the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star
is cast. . . .

•

In Memoriam

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as those that service communities outside.

No, the greatest horror lies in the fact that the purpose of the caves is to contain people within them: they are caverns of exclusion. No piecemeal and uncoordinated programs of education, welfare, jobs or other aid will change the circumstances of the masses of people imprisoned within, King concluded. Rather, it is the very walls of the cave that must come tumbling down, and with them the notion of the acceptability of such implacable restraints on any people within society. Accordingly, the last crusade envisioned by King was a war by poor people and their allies against domestic poverty and a global campaign for the eradication of poverty, racism and militarism.

Significantly, it was at this stage of the prophet's development that King was himself eliminated, the ruthless who engage in such tactics failing to recognize that a man's body may be eliminated but his spirit marches on.

Twenty-two years later, not only have the conditions within the caves worsened but in the current tenacious hold of the old rationalizations, some African-Americans sense white endorsement—if not explicit, then by default—of black genocide.

For African-Americans in the current era, something irrevocably changes in the face of such a realization. There comes a time in history when the lessons are plain, when no excuse exists any longer for old partners to waltz in each other's arms—or at arm's length—in the same old dance of monstrous domination by the one and dehumanizing subjugation of the other. At that moment both partners are free to make choices, and those choices will determine the character of the new relationship.

King himself stands as a symbol of why the old order can never return. No more heroic, no more loving crusade to change the nation for the better has ever come about than the nonviolent crusade he led. Yet before he died, he was perfectly aware that the moral imperative so briefly honored would not be translated into committed political action by the Federal government or by the people as a whole any more than had been true after the Revolutionary and the Civil Wars.

Before the end, he recognized that the struggle would have to be enlarged onto the world stage, and with uncanny foresight he laid out a new comprehensive strategy—and the choices—in *Chaos or Community?* On the eve of the twenty-first century, there seems to us little doubt that the most fundamental challenge facing the nation today is that of resurrecting the goal and pursuit of King's Poor Peoples Crusade and his quest for justice and peace worldwide.

Clearly, African-Americans must be in the vanguard in the building of such a movement. Not because we are inherently noble but because we have no choice if we are to save our children and thus have a future. To do this, those of us outside the caves must achieve solidarity with those within.

"Power, properly understood," King wrote, "is the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political or economic changes. In this sense power is not only desirable but necessary in order to implement the demands of love and justice."

In whatever form power comes to the people, he indicates, it is most often by *organized* efforts to achieve it, essentially through three means: ideological, political and economic.

Politically, we have recently witnessed a widening base of black voters and the successful implementation of alliances, as brilliantly pursued by Jesse Jackson and others on local and national levels, particularly in the South. Undoubtedly, that political base must specifically widen to catch the imagination and commitment of the masses of the ghetto disfranchised and disillusioned. Currently, as men in Washington decree that tens of thousands of young black women will enter the cheap labor market through "workfare," it is interesting to contemplate the possibility of organizing teen-age mothers into political units capable of exerting themselves to change their conditions on behalf of their children. Likewise, it is interesting to contemplate the possibility of organizing black male youth—currently under genocidal siege—on behalf of the same!

In the ideological arena, African-Americans occupy a position of uncommon and exciting advantage if we will only elevate our gaze high enough to recognize it. For, excluded from the ranks of the myth-makers in this land, we have historically had to deal with reality and

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with truth, in whatever form the truth came, if we were to survive and transcend. It is therefore we who are uniquely free to dream of a world without racism, poverty, war, sexism and all the other "isms" that plague humankind. Given our present condition, we would be foolish indeed if we did not act on the dream!

Our advantage is that untold millions of people long for such a world. Ideologically, our philosophy is rooted in the simple humanism that has always been our strength: that however much it often seems to the contrary, most people wish to be better than they are, and they wish the world to be better. Through the ages, people have been capable of dying for such beliefs (African-Americans have contributed substantially to that roster); in the twenty-first century, perhaps millions will be willing to live for them. "Cooperation," then, rather than "competition" is the essential principle that we propose should govern human affairs. Is it not possible that through application of such a principle, humankind could effect a quantum leap in ethics sufficient to match the awesome (and frequently terrifying) technological advances?

On the world scene, one thing is clear. It is time that African-Americans do what Du Bois, Malcolm X and King came to realize, each in his own time, had to be done: *elevate our struggle from the domestic arena of civil rights to the global level of human rights.* In doing so, we must bring history around full circle in re-establishing with the peoples of Africa the bonds of kinship severed so cruelly over four centuries. For the millions of black children occupying such terrible cages of war, poverty and death in African lands are a phenomenon linked in history to the millions caged in America and other nations: the intolerable fruits of European plunder, colonialism and neocolonialism extending into our times.

The most immediate responsibility faced by African-Americans is the restoration to black youth of their self-esteem and sense of place in a world so cruelly snatched from them every single day, and to encourage within them a visionary view.

A second great responsibility is that of teaching the nation, so that white Americans cannot continue to hide so grotesquely behind the myth of national equality while the relentless quiet and unquiet eradication of millions of their fellow citizens proceeds. The twentieth century has made such innocence obscene.

A century and a half ago, a free black from North Carolina living in Boston addressed an "Appeal . . . to the Colored Citizens of the World but in Particular and Very Expressly to Those of the United States of America." In four detailed parts, David Walker's appeal spelled out the crimes against African peoples, named the perpetrators and called upon slaves to rise and cast off slavery, using whatever means they had to in order to end the monstrous system.

The document caused a sensation. The slave states unsuccessfully sought to suppress it, and Walker, in Boston, met a mysterious death. Walker's influence, however, as in the case of King, could not be curtailed. It was not William Lloyd Garrison's thunderous denunciation of slavery that initiated the organized abolitionist movement but Walker in his stirring call. At the close, Walker wrote that it seemed to him there had to be some purpose to all the suffering Africans had endured in their cruel transport from their homeland.

In the twentieth century, King must surely have agreed that at landmark stages in history, it is incumbent upon human beings to declare their purpose. Do not be afraid, he surely charges African-Americans in the spirit of one of the old black spirituals upon which he loved to draw, "Walk together, children. Don'cha get weary":

> In the days ahead we must not consider it unpatriotic to raise certain basic questions about our national character. We must begin to ask, "Why are there forty million poor people in a nation overflowing with such unbelievable affluence?" . . . Why have we substituted the arrogant undertaking of policing the whole world for the high task of putting our own house in order? . . . For its very survival's sake, America must reexamine old presuppositions and release itself from many things that for centuries have been held sacred. For the evils of racism, poverty and militarism to die, a new set of values must be born. Our economy must become more person-centered than property-and-profit centered. Our govern-

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ment must depend more on its moral power than on its military power.

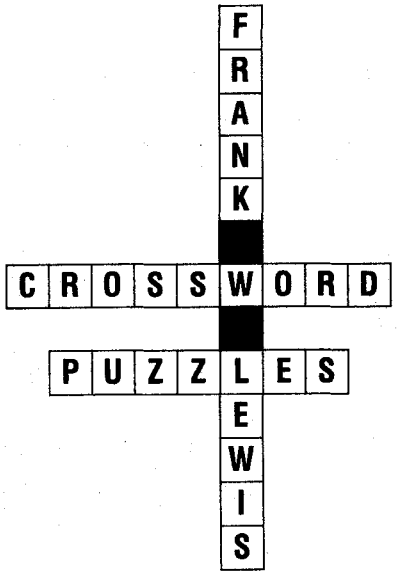
Let us . . . be those creative dissenters who will call our . . . nation to a higher destiny, to a new plateau of compassion, to a more noble expression of humaneness.

We are superbly equipped to do this. We have been seared in the flames of suffering. . . . We have learned from our have-not status that it profits a nation little to gain the whole world of means and lose the end, its own soul. We must have a passion for peace. . . . Giving our ultimate allegiance to . . . justice. . . . So in dealing with our particular dilemma, we will challenge the nation to deal with its larger dilemma.

This is the challenge. If we will dare to meet it honestly, historians in future years will have to say there lived a great people—a black people—who bore their burdens of oppression in the heat of many days and who, through tenacity and creative commitment, injected new meaning into the veins of American life.

If the challenge to African-Americans is to lead, the challenge to the nation is surely to follow. We have only to envision the prospect and undertake the task with the same determination and commitment of resources.

Let us, accordingly—*all of us*—get about the business of demolishing the walls of the caves! □



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EXCHANGE.

(*Continued From Page 110*)

zation consent form while in labor, under anesthesia or when asking for an abortion.

At this time, Fran Nathan was the leader of New York Naral. According to Karen Stamm, then at CESA, now chair of the sterilization committee of the National Women's Health Network, "Fran Nathan actively lobbied against the sterilization bill, with the assistance of another past president of Naral. A.V.S. and Planned Parenthood also testified against the New York guidelines. All three organizations spoke against the national guidelines introduced in H.E.W., where Naral testified that, since abortion funding had already been restricted, it would be cruel to poor women to restrict their access to sterilization." With the same information, Carasa drew the opposite conclusion: the fact that the Carter Administration had cut off funds for Medicaid abortions but was ready and eager to fund Medicaid sterilizations set up a situation of economic coercion, in which poor women would not be free to choose.

The guidelines were controversial even among feminists. We felt it was imperative that white feminists join black and Latino ones to prevent abuse. But NOW split on the issue: New York City NOW supported the sterilization guidelines, while California opposed them on the ground that any government interference in reproduction was a bad precedent. In October 1978, NOW's national convention voted against them, though by such a small majority that this decision was not publicized.

As for whether or not NOW joined in coalitions, in my work in Carasa I was frequently told that national NOW had passed a resolution forbidding coalition work. Certainly that is what leaders of New York NOW said whenever they refused to work with us on demonstrations, although they were generally reluctant to work with groups they felt were left-wing or "marginal." Joining Larry Lader in a lawsuit is clearly a different question.

The point of all this is not to reopen old wounds but to say that the unity of this year's abortion march is the product of years of political struggle. Hopefully it represents a new maturity and ability to work together. All of us have made mistakes; we have an obligation to the future, and to our own history, to learn from them, not to pretend they never happened.

On to Jean Elshtain, who was offended by one offhand mention of her name. I never said she didn't take women's issues seriously. I said, "the left has not in general taken women's issues as its own, and it has been relaxed in its defense of abortion rights. Writers like Christopher Lasch and Jean Bethke Elshtain prefer to defend the family, attributing its disintegration to female selfishness and the power of the women's movement." I was not thinking of Elshtain's essay in *The Nation* nor of her many books but of a piece she published in the Fall 1982 *Dissent* titled "Feminism, Family and Community," which begins with a rhapsody on the traditional values of her grandma and goes on to say that "the right has been able to portray itself as the defender of family life in part because of the early and dramatic hostility of many, though not all, feminists and radicals to all traditional social forms."

The issues of community Elshtain raises in that article are real and important, but I am not prepared to take the traditional family as the basis for my vision of social transformation. Some of this probably goes back to childhood experience; my own grandma, a terrified, poverty-stricken immigrant, didn't have the class of Elshtain's, nor had my family any vestige of traditional community values to counterpose to the market ones current in the United States. The only real community I've ever been part of is the one I helped make, the women's movement. So I'm not prepared to say with Elshtain that "right-wing defenses of the family can only be countered by a feminism that agrees that the family is a prerequisite for any form of social life," much less heap scorn on feminists who use the word "family" to describe "every ad hoc collection of persons who happens to be under one roof." Nor do I think the main contradiction we have to deal with is between "the unacceptable poles of narcissistic self-absorption, on the one hand, and single-minded, overweening commitment to 'the Cause' on the other," or that feminism has to "begin with the needs of children."

I am terribly concerned with the needs of children, including those of my own, but I am concerned with my needs as well. One is for a "beloved community"; another is not to be buried in the family and child rearing but to have full scope in the world, to take my vision as far as my powers can carry it. This doesn't mean I'm reading Jean Elshtain out of the women's movement, as she seems to fear; that's not my style. But I do think that, faced with the growth of a "family-centered" right wing, she conceded too much.

Meredith Tax

The Nation welcomes letters – typed, double spaced and no longer than 300 words, please. Longer letters may be edited for reasons of space.

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E	■	P	■	R	■	R	■	P	■	S	■	W	■	A
E	P	I	C	U	R	E	■	R	I	O	T	O	U	S
P	■	S	■	N	■	A	■	I	■	L	■	S	■	S
O	B	O	E	■	S	T	A	G	B	E	E	T	L	E
F	■	D	■	A	■	E	■	H	■	M	■	E	■	N
F	I	E	L	D	E	R	■	T	E	N	T	P	E	G
T	■	■	■	V	■	■	■	■	■	I	■	■	■	E
H	O	T	H	E	A	D	■	M	A	T	A	D	O	R
E	■	E	■	R	■	E	■	E	■	Y	■	O	■	P
G	E	N	E	T	I	C	I	S	T	■	Z	U	N	I
R	■	A	■	I	■	O	■	S	■	W	■	G	■	G
A	C	C	U	S	E	R	■	I	V	A	N	H	O	E
S	■	E	■	E	■	U	■	A	■	F	■	T	■	O
S	O	S	O	■	A	M	P	H	I	T	R	Y	O	N

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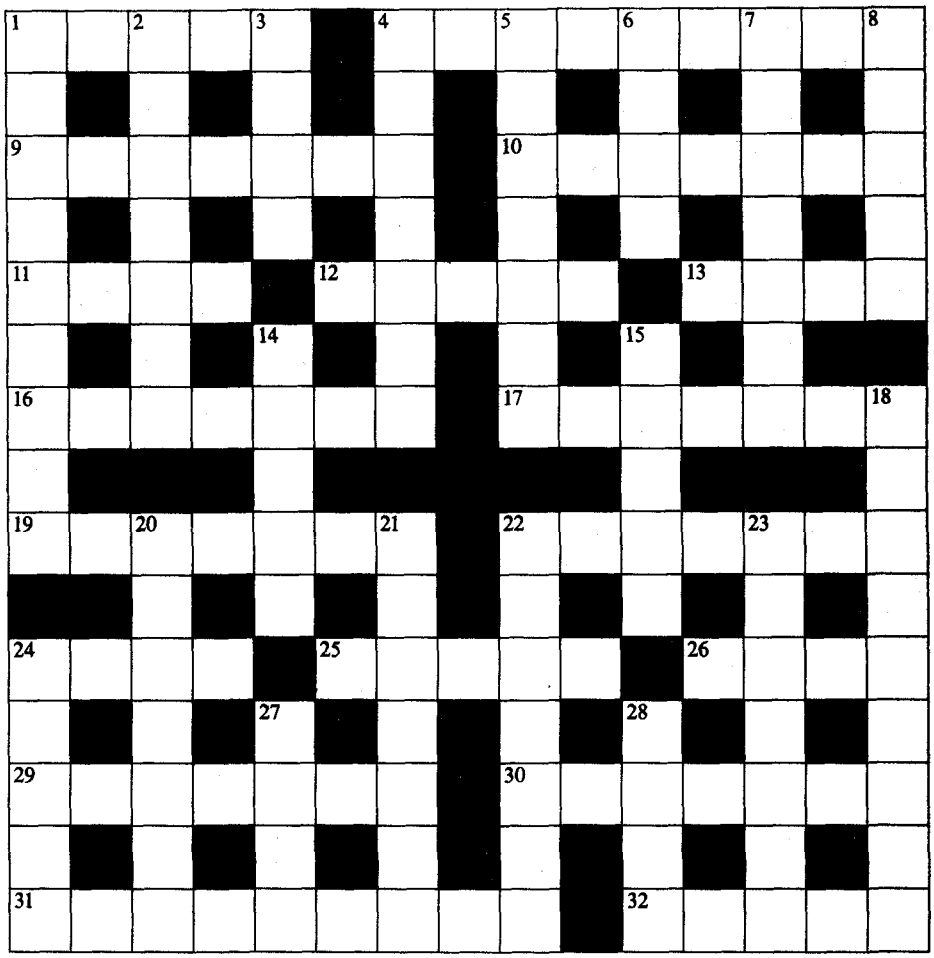

ACROSS

1 The sort of column appearing in cold or icy conditions. (5)
4 Shuttles fighters in the ring? (9)
9 Is as far, perhaps, as those things one goes on when the game may be foreign to you. (7)
10 Took the lead, as indicated by an asterisk. (7)
11, 12 and 13 The so-called brazen kind—literally outstanding! (4-5,4)
16 Is coming back with the pelts of birds. (7)
17 Men sail out of it, influencing the development of future events. (7)
19 A four-legged mother gets old, and causes some harm. (7)
22 Once more, with this, as the the saying goes? Touching, isn't it? (7)
25,26 and 24 across The scene of battle with its god, and one who could paint a portrait of its leading contestants. (5,8)
29 The old world bunting, prior to landing, shows it. (7)
30 A broken down camera I needed in the country. (7)
31 Not necessarily the main part of the helmet! (9)
32 The wrong names for an old and mossy place, according to Hawthorne. (5)

DOWN

1 Said in a way to get moved like school children, and set right concerning the idea. (9)
2 Very noisy regulations around it—but they might be part of the dress. (7)
3, 14 and 27 The wagon on the hilltop goes at a fast speed, as they say—holding material for the magazine. (9,4)
4 Do they talk quite a bit of things like balloons? (7)
5 The wandering streams of Edgar Lee, for example. (7)
6 Richard doesn't get rid of what the English consider daily. (4)
7 Continue to act up? (5,2)
8 Slippery slide? Move obliquely with it. (5)
14 See 3
15 A sign of caution, forever? (5)
18 What is Congress supposed to do? Walker's important member is not on time! (9)
20 The mail is sorted around it I see—to be called out in time of trouble. (7)
21 Such fiction is fantastic! (7)
22 Possibly leaves a bent foil, which takes time. (7)
23 Mendelssohn's Fourth, so-called. (7)
24 Not quite a standard drink for the painter! (5)
27 See 3 down
28 The name for time spent in the office? (4)

PUZZLED?

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THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF NEGRO WOMEN, INC.

BLACK WOMEN UNITED

A Powerful Force

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PURPOSE

The National Council of Negro Women is an organization of organizations that promotes empowerment and unity among black women and other women in matters affecting the educational, cultural, economic, social and spiritual life of people.

NCNW builds a common fellowship of women devoted to the task of developing creative relations among people in the United States and abroad. NCNW is a clearinghouse for the dissemination of information of concern to women.

HISTORY

Mary McLeod Bethune founded NCNW in 1935. This daughter of former slaves was a famed educator, social activist and civil libertarian. She perceived an urgent need for a national organization that could utilize the talents of black women and channel them into innovative programs of advocacy and vital human services.

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- ☐ support SISTERS magazine, which is an organ through which the needs and aspirations of African-American women and their families are communicated
- ☐ spearhead the NCNW Black Family Reunion, the foremost nationwide activity celebrating the proud past and promising future of the black family
- ☐ sustain a campaign against hunger and for community development in the U.S. and Africa
- ☐ counsel and educate youth and parents for a changing employment marketplace
- ☐ combat drug abuse
- ☐ help prevent teenage pregnancy and salvage young women's futures
- ☐ link women and career opportunities through training and entrepreneurial programs
- ☐ promote events accentuating African-Americans' proud heritage.
- ☐ support advocacy for women of color and their families in the nation's capital.

NCNW STRUCTURES

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NCNW operates nearly twenty projects ranging from AIDS education and prevention to international development work in Africa. Community based sections and affiliates conduct hundreds of activities yearly in their communities.

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